



**THE EFFECTS OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS ON  
THE EU THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL  
CONSTRUCTIVISM: THE CASES OF GERMANY AND  
HUNGARY**

**TOPLUMSAL İNŞACILIK PERSPEKTİFİNDEN  
SURİYELİ MÜLTECİ KRİZİ'NİN AB'YE ETKİSİ:  
ALMANYA VE MACARİSTAN ÖRNEKLERİ**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the Syrian refugee crisis, which incurred a variety of negative social and economic impacts upon many countries in the Middle East, as well as in Europe. The aim of this study is to analyze the divergent attitudes of Germany and Hungary in the face of Syrian refugee crisis and the diversity of measures that these countries have adopted to tackle the refugee problem. The cases are analyzed through social constructivism, which focuses mainly on how the agents and structures mutually construct each other and on identities, norms, and interests without wandering away completely from the rational standpoint. The main conclusions of this study show that the refugees are perceived differently in Germany and Hungary. Conclusions also demonstrate that the Europeans and the refugees resulted in a new and an unexpected learning experience, and enabled changes for both sides. The findings also reveal that the gap between the attitudes of the leaders of different European countries for the refugees remained significant. The change due to

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incorporation of the refugees into European societies and the differing attitudes of their leaders affected both domestic and international politics in Europe among countries that accepted different numbers of Syrian refugees.

**Keywords:** Syrian Refugee Crisis, Social Constructivism, European Union, Germany, Hungary.

## ÖZ

Bu çalışma yıkıcı sonuçlara yol açan ve Avrupa'daki insanların günlük hayatını ve siyaseti etkileyen Suriyeli mülteci krizine odaklanır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Almanya ve Macaristan'ın Suriyeli mülteci krizi sırasında aldıkları farklı tutumları ve mülteci krizini çözmek için bu ülkelerin benimsedikleri çeşitli önlemleri analiz etmektir. Bu örnek olay, temel olarak eden (yapan) ve yapıların karşılıklı birbirlerini inşa ettiğine ve kimlikler, normlar ve çıkarlara odaklanan toplumsal inşacılık yaklaşımı aracılığıyla rasyonel bakış açısından uzaklaşmadan analiz edilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın başlıca sonuçları, mültecilerin Almanya ve Macaristan'da farklı şekillerde algılandığıdır. Sonuçlar ayrıca, Avrupalıların ve mültecilerin entegrasyonunun yeni ve beklenmeyen bir öğrenme deneyimi ile sonuçlandığını ve her iki taraf için değişimlere yol açtığını gösterir. Sonuçlar ayrıca, farklı Avrupa ülke liderlerinin mültecilere yönelik olarak aldıkları tutumlar arasındaki farklılığın önemli olmaya devam ettiğini de ortaya koymaktadır. Mültecilerin Avrupa toplumlарına katılımından ve liderlerinin farklı tutumlarından kaynaklı bu değişim, Avrupa'daki farklı sayıarda Suriyeli mülteciyi kabul eden ülkelerin hem yurt içi ve uluslararası ilişkilerini farklı şekillerde ve seviyelerde etkilemiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriyeli Mülteci Krizi, Toplumsal İnşacılık Yaklaşımı, Avrupa Birliği, Almanya, Macaristan.

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the most recent historic social movements, the “Arab Spring” started in Tunisia at the end of 2010, and spread to countries such as Libya, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen in North Africa and to the Middle East. However, Syria, in which pro-democracy protests led to a civil war, has been

affected profoundly as a result of the social uprisings and subsequent mass killings of innocent civilians.

The Syrian refugee crisis is considered as the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. The number of deaths in Syria exceeded 470,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2017), and the number of internally displaced people (IDP) is estimated to be 6.5 million (The UN Refugee Agency, 2016). Additionally, the number of Syrian refugees registered by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has reached almost 5,3 million (UNHCR, 2017). Most of the refugees fled to the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey, which have suffered from the financial and social burden of hosting this unexpected influx. While, the majority of the Syrian refugees have been accepted by these neighboring countries in the Middle East, the EU countries were not willing to take refugees in especially till the beginning of the crisis. Only after the summer of 2015, the number of Syrian refugees in EU countries increased. More than one million refugees and migrants reached Europe, mainly to Greece and Italy (UNCHR, December 2015). The EU was not successful in relocating these Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Italy and Greece to other EU member states. Many of these states, including Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic, refused to take refugees under a quota plan agreed by the majority of EU leaders in 2015 to help ease the burden on these two countries. Still, the majority of the Syrians live in these neighboring countries.

The conflict has inflicted a variety of negative social and economic effects upon numerous countries in the region and in Europe. The European countries affected mostly by this refugee crisis are the ones that have become as target final destinations, as well as countries such as Greece and Italy that have served as transit routes for those fleeing to find better living conditions. According to Eurostat, EU members received more than 1.2 million first-time asylum applications in 2015, which was more than double that of the previous year. Four states (Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Austria) received approximately two-thirds of the EU's asylum applications in 2015, with Hungary, Sweden, and Austria being the top recipients of asylum applications per capita (Eurostat, 2016). More than one million migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea in 2015. However, the number dropped sharply to 364,000 in 2016 due to different measures taken to prevent this deadly route (Aljazeera, 2017). As an attempt to manage the number of Syrian refugees arriving irregularly into Europe and reducing the loss of life in the Aegean, Turkey and the EU signed an agreement named "the EU-Turkey Statement" or "the EU-Turkey Deal" on 18 March 2016. According to this agreement both sides agreed on these main actions (European Council, 2016):

1. All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey.

2. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria.

Although just after one year, irregular arrivals have fallen by 97%, and the number of refugees died at sea has decreased significantly (European Commission, 17.03.2017), this so called ‘one-to-one initiative’ has been particularly criticized by many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claiming that the deal ignored the international obligations. Furthermore, while the implementation of this deal shifted the irregular flows towards the central Mediterranean route, loss of lives unfortunately did not end.

The burden of this crisis and its humanitarian tragedy have left many countries crippled. It has also revealed divergent attitudes among the European states towards the treatment of Syrian migrants and refugees, and has led to the adoption of various measures resulting in domestic and foreign relations problems. Although the immigration and refugee problem is not a new issue for Europe, many European countries see these refugees as a serious threat. Moreover, Syrian crisis has also revealed, in recent years, some structural problems or weaknesses that already exist in receiving countries’ economies, labor markets or functioning of political institutions. The immigration and refugee problem has brought underlying economic, cultural, and societal concerns and differences to the forefront within and between the European countries. Since refugees maintain their own cultural backgrounds shaped by different socio-political contexts, norms, and policy traditions of their countries of origin, at least for a relatively long period of time, issues such as identity, norms, and interests are crucial for comprehending the effects of refugee crisis on local, national, and international levels.

The aim of this paper is to compare and comprehend the divergent attitudes of Germany and Hungary that have been affected by the Syrian refugee crisis while tackling the refugee problem. Social constructivism will be used to explain the main reasons for the different attitudes towards the refugees in these two EU member states. This approach will also be used to shed light on some changes that have emerged at both domestic and the European Union (EU) levels by focusing mainly on identities, norms, and interests, as well as by focusing on how the agents and structures influence each other. Discourse analysis method was used to present different perspectives of the politicians in Germany and Hungary in some media reports about the Syrian refugee crisis. The use of language and content in various media channels was taken into consideration for making the analysis.

## 1. WHY SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM?

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the main theories of International

Relations have been insufficient in explaining issues such as norms, identities, cultures, and values. During these years, theorists began to question the connection between theory and practice, and began asking different questions about the changing structure of politics in the world. Issues such as the environment, human rights, migration, and anti-racism were discussed along with the conventional issues, such as hard power and state interest, within the International Relations discipline. These new issues are now discussed not only by the rationalist or positivist theoreticians, but also by constructivists, who approach international relations by focusing on the constitutive role of norms and practices, ideas, and intersubjective understandings shared by agents and structures, and their preferences and consequent actions (Hopf, 1998).

Social constructivism, which takes international relations into consideration as a social relations network, has recently become one of the most popular and important approaches. The importance of constructivism in the International Relations discipline depends on the acceptance of the idea that it is seen as critical to the main disciplines (Guzzini, 2000: 147-148). Social constructivism is seen by some constructivist authors as a middle ground (Adler, 1997) between the positivist and post-positivist approaches, and has become one of the key approaches, criticizing rationalism for ignoring identity, norms, and interests.

EU discourses regarding identity and security problems have also influenced theoretical discussions since the beginning of the 1990s, a period in which rational theories were predominated. The constructivist approach has brought new dimensions to the explanation of the European integration, enabling theorists to look several issues from alternative viewpoints without ignoring rational institutions and rules, and by contributing especially to analysis of the issues from a wider perspective. Such an approach allows various issues that were not handled before to be addressed without wandering completely from the rational standpoint, but by analyzing more extensively through fundamental notions such as change, ideas, and identity, as well as through analysis how the agents and structures influence each other.

Syrian refugees have become one of the more recent agents that has influenced the daily lives of the people and politics in Europe. As new opportunities have been presented to this vulnerable group within the framework of rules imposed by the EU institutions and European states, such new opportunities have given hope that they may gain improved life conditions for themselves and their families. Thus, as the "agent" and the "structure" interact, the interests and the identity of the agents are inevitably revealed, and structure itself changes as a result of this mutual interaction with the agents. As it is going to be explained in detail in the following sections, the incorporation of the refugees to European societies and interaction of Europeans and the refugees, who interact

with the structure, has resulted in changes both at domestic and EU levels as a result of not only economic concerns, but also issues related mainly with identity, norms and ideas. These realities make social constructivism as one of the prominent theories to analyze Syrian refugee crises and the differing attitudes of various EU countries, i.e Germany and Hungary.

## 2. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DISCIPLINE

Social constructivism, a social theory emphasizing social actors and theorems, surfaced as a new approach in the International Relations discipline at the beginning of the 1990s. The basic reasons for the Constructivist Turn (Checkel, 1998; Price and Smit, 1998) in the International Relations theory of the 1990s were due to the ideological and social changes experienced in international arena. Recently, the social constructivism approach played an important role in International Relations theories as a result of its capability in analyzing the relations between the state and society, and particularly due to its capability to analyze social composition of constructed international relations (Guzzini, 2000).

Social constructivism gained particular importance as a result of the emphasis it places on the social aspects of international relations, and by taking a non-traditional approach to the relations between state and society. Constructivist authors asserted that this approach represented a middle ground between the positivist and post-positivist approaches. Since then constructivism has become one of the fundamental approaches that challenges rationalist conceptual approaches.

The main focal point of constructivists is that the world is socially constructed. Constructivists criticize the unilateral and material point of view as political and social worlds are neither entirely physical nor material entities, but one of the most important aspect of international relations is also social. Thus, social constructivist approach does not fully reject material factors, but suggests that these factors find their meaning through social relations. Furthermore, social reality is subjective and is external for anyone who observes international relations. Therefore, the studies performed within the scope of constructivism focus on norms, ideas, and beliefs therein and the ideas constructed by actors in the international field.

Following the studies of Nicholas Onuf, which constitute the philosophic infrastructure of the constructivism (Onuf, 1989, 1998), Alexander Wendt aimed to create a social theory for international relations in his book, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Wendt, 1999), in which neo-realism was criticized. One of the most cited names in the International Relations discipline since the beginning of the 1990s, Wendt aimed to expose the changing nature of the states and

anarchy, and developed a theory based on this infrastructure within the International Relations discipline (Wendt, 2003). Authors such as Friedrich Kratochwil, Jeffrey Checkel, Ted Hopf, Emanuel Adler, Peter Katzenstein, Audie Klotz, Stefano Guzzini, Thomas Risse, John Ruggie, and Martha Finnemore have also contributed to the development of the social constructivist approach.

The constructivist approach particularly emphasizes the role of ideas in the politics of the world, and, contrary to other approaches, places priority on elements such as norms, identities, and interests, and researches the identity and interests of the actors in state-society relations. Because interests and preferences are not external, they are formed socially, and thus collective understandings are important. (Price and Smit, 1998: 282-283). These are included within the field of principles, norms, and institutions. The social constructivist approach does not necessarily reject material factors, but suggests that these factors become meaningful as a result of significant social relations and social opinions. In this respect, constructivism suggests that neither material nor social factors ignore each other, and none of them are dominant because no significant segregation is placed between social and material elements. The intention is to search and reveal the social meaning of material elements as material resources gain importance for human activities through the structure in which they are accommodated. These structures not only provide a regulatory influence on the actors, but also produce a constructive effect. In addition, identities constitute interests and activities of the agents.

According to constructivists, norms affect the determination of the identity, whereas the identity affects the determination of foreign policy behaviors. Therefore, the behaviors in foreign politics shall change as far as new norms arise or changes in existing norms occur or lose their effect.<sup>1</sup> Norms, defined by Finnemore and Sikkink as "appropriate behavior standards of the actors with a defined identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 891)<sup>2</sup>, are not only instrumental and regulatory (Onuf, 1989; Kratochwil, 1989). They, at the same time, assist the transformation and the re-establishment of the identities of the actors and their interests, and they represent or indicate the truth that must be followed (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 912). In this way, the norms and the rules

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<sup>1</sup>See for detailed information and examples about the roles of rules and norms in the discipline of International Relations. Kratochwil F. 1989. *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Another definition implies that norms are common expectations concerning proper attitudes for a certain identity. Jepperson, et al., 2006. "Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security." In *The Culture of National Security* edited by Katzenstein, Peter, 33-75. New York: Columbia University Press: 54.

that are to be followed become part of the identity. The established identity enables the determination of the interests.

Moreover, the approach analyzes the social world within an inter-subjective dimension, and highlights that the “agent” and the “structure” mutually constitute each other. The interests and the identity of the agents are revealed during this construction process. Structures form the agents in the aspects of interests and identities, whereas the structure itself reveals and changes as a result of this mutual interaction with the agents (Price and Smit, 1998: 266-267). This is one of the main arguments of the approach, and will be highlighted in this paper to reveal the consequences and the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on some of the European countries.

As innovative an approach as constructivism has been, the contributions of the approach fall short where there is no stability and order, and they are especially insufficient in explaining the effect of non-Western norms on agents. Therefore, non-Western norms can be a new area for social constructivists to work on. In addition, constructivist authors have been criticized mainly because they couldn't sufficiently explain how norms affect a “change” in the system (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 894). In this respect, this paper helps to comprehend how social constructivism can explain “change” by taking into consideration the importance of values and norms with the Syrian refugee crisis as a case study.

### **3. COMPREHENDING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE EU MIGRATION POLICY FROM THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH**

Between the 1950s and 1980s, the theories regarding the European integration such as functionalism, neo-functionalism, and intergovernmentalism were mainly experienced a transformation and diversification in line with the social, judicial, and political structures that changed and became more complex as a result of the acceleration of the widening and deepening efforts of the EU. Therefore, the integration theories became insufficient in explaining the integration process and its future. From the end of 1980s, the social constructivist approach<sup>3</sup>, as a new approach in the discipline of International Relations, began to affect the theoretical discussions on European integration, and created a new

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<sup>3</sup> However, social constructivism is not the theory of European integration. That's why, for example, neo-functionalism and constructivism should not be mistaken. Moreover, constructivists have no attempt for developing a “grand theory” related to the European integration. There is a relation between the basic concepts of neo-functionalism, the period of socialization, transfer of loyalty, redefining of interests and constructivism and some concepts are used commonly, but it is not possible to melt them in the same pot. See for the detailed information. Christiansen, T., K. E. Jørgensen, A. Wiener (2001), “Introduction.” In *The Social Construction of Europe* edited by T. Christiansen, K. E. Jørgensen, A. Wiener. London: Sage Publications: 3.

field focusing on the complex structure of the EU. An issue of the Journal of European Public Policy, published in 1999 and dedicated to the Social Construction of Europe<sup>4</sup>, is a good indication of the increasing number of academic studies undertaken from the constructivist approach within a mere decade. Some authors who presented their EU studies in this journal<sup>5</sup> argued that institutions not only affected behaviors, but also affected the preferences and identities of individuals and states. Others claimed that the constructivist approach provided a wider and deeper ontology in comparison to rationalist approaches on European integration.<sup>6</sup> This approach provides a basis for comprehending the social ontologies, such as identity, community, and collective understanding in Europe (Pollack, 2000, 15). While rational theoreticians regard norms and institutions as tools used to enhance the benefits of a state, the importance of institutions in the constructivist theory is more determinant in specifying the behaviors of a state.

The constructivist approach brought new dimensions to the explanation of the European integration without ignoring rational institutions and rules, and contributed to analyzing the changes in recent years from a wider perspective. Of course, it's difficult to comprehend EU integration by means of a single approach, and constructivism is no exception. However, the constructivist approach supports the studies of integration by highlighting some of the issues about the EU that have never been addressed or have been previously ignored. Even though the process of integration was based on economic reasons at the beginning, it seems that it is no more possible to keep states integrated simply for economic reasons, as they must be integrated socially and politically as well if they are to succeed. The constructivist approach provides not only an important viewpoint, positioning norms, rules, and values in the foreground, but also highlights the fact that this process can only be built together with states and societies involved in a continuous and mutually constructive way.

The values, rules, and norms, which constitute a basis for an inter-subjective approach<sup>7</sup>, have become one of the focusing areas for constructivist writers. EU values, such as rule of law, liberalism, democracy, tolerance, and solidarity, are adopted at the community level, and are handled from theoretical and empirical

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<sup>4</sup> Journal of European Public Policy. 1999. Vol. 6.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Risse, Thomas. (2000), "Exploring the Nature of Beast, International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union." *Journal of Common Market Studies*. 34: 53-80.

<sup>6</sup> There are also criticisms about the approach in the issue. For example, there are criticisms of Steve Smith from the reflectivist perspective and criticisms of Moravcsik of the rationalist perspective.

<sup>7</sup> See for the intersubjective unit of analysis. Guzzini, Stefano. (2000), "A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations." *European Journal of International Relations*, 6 (6):147-182.

points of view along with social facts, such as identity, interests, language, and social interaction. They emphasize the importance of norms in order to understand the politics in the member states and the EU institutions, which incorporate meaningful action (Zehfuss, 2002, 19). As Checkel states, “rationalists emphasize coercion, cost/benefit calculations, and material incentives and constructivists stress social learning, socialization, and social norms (Checkel, 2001).” As will be analyzed in the next section, the Syrian refugee crisis has created a new learning and socializing environment for Europeans.

The migration policy can also be seen as one of the most suitable areas that constructivist writers can develop. These writers can move beyond the traditional integration theories, such as federalism, neo-functionalism, and intergovernmentalism, and comprehend the roles and effects of new agents such as Syrian refugees and migrants, as they believe that states, agents and the structures constantly involved in mutual interaction. In addition, norms, values, and identities can be included more in their analyses regarding European integration. In that respect, the social constructivist approach has provided a wider framework for the recognition of various dimensions of the Union.

Therefore, there is much to say about issues such as identity and governance, inclusion and exclusion, nature of state-society relations, democracy, and constitution of “the other” in Europe within the research field of the social constructivist approach (Buyuktanir, 2015:18). This approach clarifies the role norms and ideas play in the constitution of identities, interests, and behaviors in the EU.

From the social constructivist approach point of view, the effects of the refugee crisis on the EU migration policy can be explained with not only economic reasons, but also with identities and norms. The reactions of the European countries to refugees by emphasizing both economic and political aspects, as well as the norms, identities, and interests are understandable. However, the constructivist approach is also instrumental to comprehend the divergence of attitudes and national policies towards refugees and immigrants.

From a rationalist perspective, if a country benefits from accommodating and integrating refugees, it probably supports the refugees crossing its borders. Thus, the rationalist approach addresses mostly how migrants’ roles in accommodating countries’ national economies. For instance, according to this approach, refugees can produce economic and demographic benefits for Germany, whose population is growing older and needs the support of the refugees for its labor force. Therefore, in the long term, Germany may actually benefit from the refugee crisis. On the contrary, the constructivist approach requires that a country’s pro-migrant position can be explained by its deeply

internalized European identity, which is based on the values such as democracy, tolerance, and solidarity. Likewise, from the same perspective, anti-migrant positions can be justified by a country's emergence to nationalist identity discourses.

In the case of the refugee crisis, one of the most important aspects of the issue is how the European citizens perceive the refugees. Is it possible to integrate these people without seeing them as "others," or can Western and Eastern norms be interwoven so that both the Syrians and the European people can live in harmony? To a great extent, integrating the refugees depends on the perceptions of a host country's policy-makers and citizens and the national and cultural identity of that country. For instance, as will be explained in the next section, living in Hungary will not be as easy for refugees as living in Germany because of the historical, political, and social differences between these two countries, and the differences between their existing, or non-existing, experiences with immigrant in the last decades.

In this regard, the Syrian refugee crises may pave the way for theorists who are interested in exploring the effects of non-Western norms on the interaction between the European and non-native European communities in Europe. In this sense, several questions about the non-Western norms and their effects on the European countries must be answered, such as:

- How can we differentiate Western and non-Western norms?
- Are "non-Western" lifestyles and norms seen as a threat to "Western norms," and are these norms really different from each other?
- How can societies deal with the fears that non-Western norms, beliefs, and lifestyle might change traditional Western norms?
- Will non-Western norms exert an influence on the policy discourses in some European countries?

The main elements of social constructivism explained earlier help us to understand various norms and beliefs of countries that cause opposing political and social reactions/attitudes towards refugees. In some countries, the Eurocentric approach to "others" makes it difficult to accept non-Europeans' ideas, norms, and values. As a result of the Syrian refugee crisis, Europe had begun to accept more non-Europeans with different identities and interests into their communities. This diversity causes a forced interaction among agents/actors and structures. The resistance to or acceptance of this transformation has created domestic, social, and political changes in the European countries, and institutional and policy modifications at the EU level. To best analyze these changes, theorists need to concentrate on the countries where these changes are more pronounced, such as Germany, Holland, Greece, Austria, Hungary, and Italy. Since Germany and Hungary are polar opposites on this issue, they make an ideal comparative

study, and will therefore be analyzed in this paper by using discourse analysis method.

#### **4. WHY IDENTITY AND NORMS MATTER: GERMANY'S AND HUNGARY'S STRATEGIES REGARDING THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS**

In this section, the perceptions of German and Hungarian politicians and their discourses concerning the Syrian Refugee Crisis are analyzed through the discourse analysis method. The political discourses emanating from Germany and Hungary throughout the refugee crisis period reveal the main tendencies, positions, and reactions of policy makers and the citizens in these countries towards the Syrian refugee crisis. The most noticeable proposals designed to reduce the effects of the refugee crises and find ways to deal with the refugee problem espouse opposite discourses and policies on refugees. They show that the states' identity, culture, and historical differences are essential for comprehending the domestic and foreign political approaches, as the shared intersubjective meanings of identities are different in each country. The approaches of Germany and Hungary towards the Syrian refugee crisis can be analyzed from various perspectives, such as economic, social, cultural, and political. But within the framework of our theoretical approach, this paper will focus primarily on the social and political tendencies by providing additional supporting data related to the economic and demographic situations in both countries.

Germany, being the most powerful economy in the EU, has both the financial and organizational capacity to deal with the problems related to the Syrian refugees. Within the EU countries, GDP in Germany and Hungary have not varied considerably while Germany—the growth locomotive in Europe—retained its place as the most significant economy (World Bank, 2018)<sup>8</sup>. The GDP reports indicate that the refugees may not prove a significant burden on the stronger German economy, while, Hungary with a relatively weaker economy, may be more concerned about the housing expense, feeding, and socially and economically integrating the refugees. Therefore, the Hungarian government has to project the costs of accepting increasing number of migrants and refugees more carefully. On the other hand, both Germany and Hungary need these refugees because of their recent demographic changes. At first glance, comparing the total populations of Germany and Hungary seems like asymmetrical as both countries have experienced steady decreases in their total fertility rates since the end of Second World War (Behr et.al., 2002: 282). Statistics show that Germany, with 1.50 live births per woman, has some hardships in reproducing its population, and

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<sup>8</sup> During this period, while Germany's GDP was 3.478 trillion dollars, hungary recorded a slight decrease throughout the years between 2015 and 2016 in its economy with a GDP of 125.817 billion dollars in 2016.

Hungary is experiencing nothing different than Germany with a rate of 1.45 (Eurostat, 2017). As is clearly seen, the population in both countries is growing older, and, like the many other European countries, the procreation rate is declining. Population in these two countries is expected to shrink in the near and mid-term future, and will be unable to meet the demands of their labor force. Accepting thousands of refugees will increase the percentage of active workforce and improve the financial capability of funding for the older population, help to boost the national economy, and raise the country's GDP. Therefore, welcoming of refugees and immigrants by both countries is practical and sensible. Ironically, though, most of the Hungarians and some of the Germans perceive them as "threats," as they attach importance mainly to issues such culture, identity, and religion.

Beyond the economic and demographic circumstances, the previous historical experience of these two countries with a variety of immigrants has influenced their positions and actions in dealing with the Syrian refugee crises. While Germany has become more open and liberalized in its immigration policies, Hungary has created restrictive and more nationalistic policies as a result of the previous experience with immigration flows and refugee crises, especially after the Second World War.

In the case of Germany, approximately 12 million refugees from the former German territories returned back to Germany after WWII and, between 1955 and 1970, the country experienced another immigration influx when many young men mostly from Italy, Greece, and especially Turkey, immigrated to Germany looking for jobs as guest workers (Green, 2013: 333; Martin, 1991: 1; Toktaş, 2012: 5). These workers helped to boost the Germany's economy by expediting the reconstruction efforts following the WWII. Although there was resistance and restrictions placed on these guest workers in the 1970s, German citizens adapted to their existence and reintegration with their families in German society. Gradually, this led to the start of liberalization of immigration policies in Germany (Khan, 2001). As a result, these wide range of migration waves such as labor migration, family reunions, asylum seekers, and refugees paved the way for more socially, economically, culturally and politically multicultural communities in Germany (Toktaş, 2012:5-7) and the country has become progressively more tolerant towards migrants and refugees (Havlova, 2016).

Furthermore, Germany's leading role in the EU influenced its migration and asylum policies. As being one of the founding members, Germany has played a pivotal and leading role in realization of the European integration project. For instance, Germany played active roles in establishing the EU migration policy along with the other members like France and the UK. Thus, from the beginning, Germany had time to adapt the European ideals and this leadership position in

the EU helped Germany to improve its ability and willingness to accept more refugees and migrants. As a result of its comparatively more inclusive policies for migrants and refugees by taking EU's norms and ideals as a base, Germany has become one of the most convenient and secure places for massive inflows of foreigners. And, it is still one of the top destination countries for immigrants.

On the other hand, Hungary, among the latest members to the EU like the Central and Eastern European States (CEES), has undergone a different experience. Hungary as the other CEES started experiencing immigration flows during the 1990s. First, the country hosted immigration flows later than Germany, when ethnic Hungarians in former territories returned to Hungary during the 1990s, mostly from Romania and former Yugoslavia. Hungary implemented a very structured and organized process to handle refugees, but was not very pleased to host four million people moving from East to West (Behr, 2002: 232). Unlike in Germany, there was not an economic boost as a result of the influx either, and the Hungarians believe that their resources were reduced as a result of the previous refugee crises. The most remarkable point is perhaps the Hungarians see the migrants and refugees as a threat to their ethnicity and nationality. The migration flows were taken as a threat to national identity and the homogeneity of the communities. Although Hungary did not experience a similar large scale immigration flows like Germany, especially the conservative political parties expressed these influxes as a problem for the future and they created fears among the Hungarians (Korkut, 2014). As a result, Hungarian immigration has enforced more restrictive policies in order to preserve Hungarian ethnicity and nationality, and has remained less willing to take foreigners in.

Before analyzing two countries, it is also important to explain the changing concept of securitization of migration in Europe and the effects of growing xenophobia and racism from a social constructivist approach as these two have influenced the social and political tendencies in both member states and the EU.

For constructivists, not only the power, but also the identities and norms are important on the definition of security (Karacasulu and Uzgören, 37). For constructivists that have espoused a wider concept of security without ignoring the importance of military threats and military power as instruments, security and threats are also socially constructed. As Rieker states "The concept of security among the Social Constructivists is therefore in some sense more flexible, and therefore more able to capture the changes in threat perception and security instruments." Changes in threat perceptions influenced the both the states in Europe and the EU.

Since the end of Cold War, the EU revised its migration policy by more taking into account the security problems. Although it has adopted liberal

practices and humanitarian inclinations, migrants have started to be associated with socio-economic problems, and were portrayed as a threat to welfare state and to cultural identity and norms of host countries (Huymans, 2006). As a result of these measures, more restrictive asylum and refugee practices have been adopted and police and judicial cooperation between the participating states have been enhanced (Malcolm and Bort, 2001, 58). Furthermore, since the 9/11 and following attacks in some countries such as Spain, the UK, and France, they have been perceived as a security issue with regard to terrorism. In this regard, refugees and migrants can be perceived as one of the agents that have changed the perception of threat and the security instruments of the member states and the EU.

The Germans or Hungarians like the other Europeans with shared and collective self in their environment, have identified agents or “others” that can be dangerous or threats to the community or group. The Syrian refugees have been perceived as potentially problematic as they have different values, norms and identities. All these changing perceptions influenced the politics in both countries.

From the political point of view, Germany’s leading role in EU politics, and its efforts to improve European integration and to strengthen the Union’s outlook in the world, explains its position in domestic and foreign politics. As previously stated, European identity is linked to values such as the rule of law, liberalism, democracy, tolerance, and solidarity. These values are widely expressed by politicians in Germany, while the sense of “European-ness” is not broadly shared in most of the EU member states. In the process of integrating the refugees, especially since the end of 2014, Germany has taken bold initiatives, acting as a leader in formulating and pushing forward to find solutions in EU institutions. It has based its policies on a principled dedication to the ideal of a “Multi-Cultural Europe.” In addition, Germany has played a major role in negotiating deals with third countries, including Turkey. Dedicated to the belief that Europe shoulders the responsibility of contributing to a humanitarian solution, Germany differs from those countries in the Union whose anti-migrant policies contribute to the growing humanitarian crises (e.g., Hungary and Austria), and manages the process by means of its unparalleled economic and political supremacy in the Union. Furthermore, Germany has played a decisive role in the Turkey-EU relationship within the context of the refugee crises.

Despite Germany’s leading role as a country, German citizens’ increasing support of anti-immigrant parties presents an undeniable fact that there is a gap between the wills of the politicians and the citizens in Germany. Although the policy makers try to maintain a balance between citizens’ demands and the political will of the ruling parties, it is clear that there is a difference between the political and social reactions in Germany (Havlova, 2016: 93). For instance, there has been a much higher number of violent incidents directed at asylum seekers.

According to Guardian, in 2015 (until September), “the German interior ministry had recorded 336 assaults on refugee shelters – over a 100 more than in the whole of 2014. The majority of these attacks had a rightwing motive” (The Guardian, 2015). Furthermore, anti-immigrant parties have enjoyed an unprecedented surge in the last elections. In the last federal elections of September 2017, the radical right-wing and anti-immigration party-AfD (Alternative fur Deutschland), founded in 2013, became the first far-right party to be represented in the Bundestag since the end of the Second World War by winning 13.5% of the votes. This election result revealed clearly that the number of German citizens who were not supporting the Chancellor Merkel’s migration policies was increasing.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Merkel has tried within the last three years to find ways that she could draw less reaction from the German citizens not to lose her political power. For instance, Germany struck a deal with Turkey that paved the way for decreasing the number of the refugees that can enter EU member countries. As a result of these efforts, the number of Syrian refugees in Germany dropped dramatically in 2017. The Office of Migrants and Refugees (BAMF) registered 186,644 asylum seekers in 2017 compared to approximately 280,000 in 2016. In 2015 the number was 890,000 Syrians (Deutsche Welle, 2018).

Although Germany has instituted more liberalized migration policies and has previously experienced mass migration and refugee influx, some of the German citizens believe that thousands of refugees pouring into their country may create problems for their cultural and religious identities. Unfortunately, recent security concerns about the increasing terrorist attacks in their country, organized mainly by extreme Islamist groups, have exacerbated this concern. In domestic politics, Merkel tried to maintain a balance between the reactions among German citizens and her country’s critical role in the EU institutions. As a result, she has taken considerable risks, as not all of the German population welcomes the refugees. Merkel’s open door policy for immigrants and refugees, along with the latest terror attacks, has resulted in a huge impact on the loss of her votes (The Guardian, 2017).

While Germany seeks to preserve the EU’s “legal and moral obligation” towards the refugees, Hungary refuses to deal with the situation, invoking “Christian values under threat” in its defense. In domestic politics, the refugee problem has been used as a tool to gain more support from the Hungarian citizens,

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<sup>9</sup> Another example to support the idea that the anti-migrant parties have been getting stronger in Europe can be given from Czech Republic. Although Czech Republic, unlike Poland and Hungary, didn’t have hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants crossing its territory at the height of the 2015 refugee crisis, in the last parliamentary elections in October 2017, welcomed an anti migrant leader. Andrej Babis, who won the elections, stated that he would run his country like a business and keep out Muslim immigrants. <http://www.standard.net/World/2017/10/17/Czech-Republic-to-elect-anti-establishment-anti-immigrant-billionaire-political-novice-as-its-next-leader>

who mostly oppose an inclusive approach towards the refugees. Viktor Orban, who is defending a tough anti-migrant position in Hungary, has gained a growing support among the general public. His Fidesz party won the two-thirds of the majority for the third time in the 2018 elections. Therefore, the debates and discourses on identity and culture supersede the economic concerns in Hungary.

When we examine the statements of politicians in these two countries, it will be clearer to comprehend their stances regarding the refugee problem. In general, German Chancellor Merkel's statements strengthen the country's dedication to the ideal of a "Multi-Cultural Europe." For instance, in one of her interviews in *Der Spiegel*, Merkel states that "If we had not shown a friendly face, that's not my country" (Der Spiegel, 2015). Merkel emphasizes the language of shared European ideals and maintains that the continent as a whole must deal with the problem: "If Europe fails on the question of refugees, its close connection with universal civil rights will be destroyed" (The Guardian, 2015). Some other politicians also support Merkel's ideas. For instance, in her statement, Germany's Secretary-General of German Social Democratic Party, Yasmin Fahimi, agrees that it is imperative that Germany "gives a strong signal of humanity to show that Europe's values are valid also in difficult times" (Reuters, 2015). Merkel has also criticized Hungary's refugee policy, describing its way of handling the crisis as unbearable, and reacting to Orban's anti-immigrant statements as the "Shame of Budapest" (Reuters, 2015).

Hungarian Prime Minister Orban's statements clearly demonstrate that he places more importance on European identity, and differentiates European identity and Christianity from non-European identities. In many statements, such as "European identity is rooted in Christianity" and "keep Europe Christian" (The Nytimes, 2015), Orban identifies refugees as a threat to Hungary's and Europe's Christian identity. To emphasize these cultural concerns, he states: "I am speaking about culture and the everyday principles of life, such as sexual habits, freedom of expression, equality between men and woman and all those kind of values which I call Christianity" (EurActive, 2015).

As a result, we see a more liberal and tolerant Germany vs. a more nationalistic, culturally self-centered, and less tolerant Hungary. The values and norms that these two countries adopt are different, although they are both members of the EU and share some common values and norms. Germany's multicultural approach exemplifies a positive attitude towards refugees overall, and the German Chancellor has maintained a strong pro-migrant position throughout the refugee crisis. But she has still been trying to maintain a political and social balance by adopting some measures aimed at finding ways to decrease the number of refugees in Europe, and encourages other member states to also take some initiatives regarding the migration policy in the EU in order to maintain

harmony among the member states. As a result of this discrepancy between members, the Germany-led EU has begun pressuring member states that do not support EU norms and values. However, Hungary, among others, continues to resist. Recently the EU has undergone crises on several fronts, including the Greek financial crisis and Brexit. To preserve its unity and maintain its norms and values, the EU must find a way to convince the member states and other national governments in Europe that it is in their best interests to live in harmony with the refugees.

## 5. CHANGES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EU

As stated previously, the differences between these two countries with regard to norms, ideas and beliefs, as well as historical background, have played a significant role in the Syrian refugee crises. These two countries' responses to the Syrian refugee crisis have been shaped by their different economic situations and demographic changes, but mainly by historical backgrounds and socio-political systems, both directly related to the norms and ideals that the citizens and states have instituted. Therefore, the political responses to the refugee crisis cannot be defined by how well a state can provide the necessary economic resources. It is also a matter of the norms, rules, and identities of these countries. As is clearly visible in Germany and Hungary, public opinion and the political leadership play substantial roles. In this Syrian refugee crisis, the agents and the structures have affected each other and generated "changes" on European states, citizens, and institutions.

### A New (Forced) Life With New Norms For the Syrian Refugees in Europe

The political and social regulations aimed at integrating Syrian refugees have influenced the refugees, as they had to adapt with the new norms and rules. The rules and norms that the refugees are expected to accept, or at least adapt for themselves, may become part of their lives and their identity, even if one day they prefer to go back to their own countries. A newly established life would affect their interests in the future as well. On the other hand, while the refugees try to adapt themselves to the European lifestyles and to Western values and norms, the native people in the countries that have accepted refugees, along with the EU institutions, try to find new ways of integrating them into their own institutional structures and daily lives in order to create an environment conducive to a collective understanding. As a result, there has been a mutual change in terms of both adopting and integrating new rules and norms between the refugees and the European citizens and institutions, especially since 2015 .

As the constructivist writers argue, the institutions do not only affect the behaviors, but also preferences and identities of individuals. According to the inclusive or exclusive reactions of the European states, the refugees face relatively

easier or tougher conditions. For instance, the living conditions for the refugees in some pro-migrant countries, such as Germany and Sweden, can be easier compared to Poland, Hungary or Austria, which have adopted anti-migrant policies. Similar to Germany, Sweden have accepted by far the largest number of refugees in Europe (Berry Mike, Page 24). Sweden places less restrictions to the non-EU member states, and assigns entry visas generously to asylum seekers and refugees. When the refugees and migrants enter the country, it is also easier for them to find jobs as they are allowed to work (Bauer et. al, 2000). On the contrary, particularly in some countries like Hungary, Austria, and Poland, it is more difficult for refugees to find jobs as well as to live in peaceful and inclusive environments as a result of growing nationalism, xenophobia, and hostility to migrants (The Guardian, 2018).

### **The Rise of Populism in Europe and Anti-Immigration Party Challenge in the EU**

Not only a state's willingness and ability to accept refugees, but also the citizen's reactions have affected the Syrian refugees in Europe. More people in European countries have started to question whether these refugees and migrants could change their norms, beliefs, lives, and limit their job opportunities. As a result, parties that have adopted anti-migrant approaches have gained strength in Europe, and the policy discourse of these parties has been emboldened to the point that migrants and refugees are considered as burdens on countries. This became a powerful talking point for national identity and Western norms and lifestyles proponents.

The rise of populism, mostly right-leaning, opened the door for the parties that have anti immigrant sentiments. Besides Germany and Hungary, in Europe the number and the effects of the far-right parties--some longstanding, others newly formed--have been increasing to the point that they have begun to achieve electoral success. For instance, in France, National Front, a nationalist party that employs populist rhetoric to promote its anti-immigration and anti-European Union positions; in Greece the Golden Dawn Party, a party that holds anti-immigrant views; in Austria, the Freedom Party that supports the limitation of benefits for immigrants and favoritism for Austrians in the job market (The New York Times, 2016), have all made political progress at the polls.

### **Push For EU to Change the Immigraton Policy and Revelation of Differences Among the Member States**

Contrasting actions in EU member states regarding the Syrian refugee crises has caused a lack of consensus within the EU. As a result, the political structure of the EU has become more fragile. Some countries, such as Austria and some of the Balkans, have refused to adopt inclusive policies towards refugees and

migrants. For instance, in June 2016, the Austrian parliament passed controversial legislation paving the way for tougher measures on asylum. It includes, for example, an accelerated process for assessing potential asylum claims under which migrants could be turned away at the border. Austria also planned to build a fence at the border with Italy to keep out migrants.

Some of the migration and refugee policies, including the Geneva Convention, the Dublin Regulation, and the quota system, have revealed the differences among the EU member states in terms of laws, and standards as well as social reactions. Under the leadership of Germany, a quota system was proposed in 2015. The reason was that the Dublin Regulation placed a heavy burden on EU border states, such as Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria, as the first states that the Syrian refugees enter. Despite the EU's attempts to harmonize its members' policies, this crisis exposed the differences among the EU member states with regard to immigration policies. Not only Hungary, but also Britain and Eastern European countries, including Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic, have resisted the plan.

In this process of accepting and incorporating refugees and migrants, the immigration policy of the European Union has begun to be questioned, and the values, such as tolerance, inclusion, and democracy at the community level. The EU has opened itself to criticism as the result of some member countries' refusal to be more inclusive to the refugees. Refugees have become "the new other" in Europe, triggering a tear in the EU member states' structure as a singular unit.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As has been analyzed up to this point by using discourse analysis method, Syrian refugees have become one of the agents that have influenced the daily lives of the people and politics in Europe. However, as clearly documented with the attitudes of the citizens of the hosting countries and their leaders, as in the Germany and Hungary comparative example studied in this paper, agent-structure interactions cannot be explained purely by the rationalist approach. From a rationalist perspective, if a country benefits from accommodating and integrating refugees, it probably supports the refugees crossing its borders. Thus, the rationalist approach addresses mostly how migrants' roles in accommodating countries' national economies. If rationalist view had been enough to explain the aftermath of the refugee crises and the interactions of the agents and the structure, then the refugees would have been welcome equally in both countries due to their potentially boosting effect on the economies, where the population and the workforce are aging. However, as documented by news from the media, Germany and Hungary demonstrate completely different attitudes towards the refugees. Therefore, these interactions and the attitudes of the native populations of these

countries and their leaders should be explained from a social constructivist point of view, which places emphasis on the social aspects of relations between state and society, and how they change each other.

The examples given from the media during the course of the Syrian refugee crisis challenges rationalist conceptual approaches by demonstrating that these relations are socially constructed more than anything else, both for the agents and for the structures. For instance, in Germany, the society is more tolerant towards migrants and refugees due to their past experiences with immigration from different countries and by beholding that these people were actually helpful to the economy and welfare. And, therefore, they do not necessarily see them and their identities and beliefs as threats to their lifestyle, security, culture and religion. Since this being the case, both the society and the leaders are more proactive, even by taking political risks, in honoring the EU values, such as democracy, tolerance and solidarity and in adapting the structure to the needs of the refugees. A more welcoming society and an evolving structure through interactions with the agents may be more inclusive and may offer new opportunities to this vulnerable group within the framework of rules imposed by the EU institutions. Such new opportunities may give hope to refugees that they may gain improved life conditions for themselves and their families, which in turn may help for them to become more adaptive of the imposed rules of integration.

On the other hand, in Hungary, the fact that the previous migrations did not necessarily helped Hungary's economy as much as they did to Germany's, and the fact that both the society and leader see refugees as "others" and a threat to security and to their Christian identity makes it difficult for them to accept non-Europeans' ideas, norms, and values to change institutional and policy modifications, making life more difficult for the refugees living in Hungary.

Thus, in brief, as the "agent" and the "structure" interact, the interests and the identity of the agents are revealed, and ideally the structure itself may change as a result of this mutual interaction. Since these are socially based interactions, social constructivism is one of the prominent theories to analyze Syrian refugee crises in the context of differing attitudes within the EU, and that's why it has been used in this paper.

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