Timofey Agarin,
Nevena Nancheva (eds.)

A EUROPEAN CRISIS

Perspectives on Refugees, Solidarity, and Europe

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Agarin, Nancheva (eds.)   A European Crisis

This is a book about the crisis of the European integration project as seen from the vantage point of people's movements across and to the European continent. But why should the issue of refugees or of migration have anything to do with the dynamics of the integration or disintegration of the European Union? If anything, the existing global refugee protection regime was conceived in Europe at about the time when Europe began to integrate: It was seen as a moral imperative in the context of European solidarity and in the face of crisis. How did refugee protection become so controversial as to usher in a crisis of its own? Why do European governments and their peoples see refugees and migrants as the cause of a crisis in and of Europe? Solidarity, legitimacy, democracy, welfare, rights: How has refugee migration undermined European positions on all that has defined EU integration so far?

This collection engages with these questions by focusing on the construction of the crisis narrative, offering an insight into distinctly European perspectives on and analyses of political responses to refugees, migration, and economic challenges. The aim of the volume is to provide an empirical and thematic context for understanding the link between refugee migration and the overpowering perception of Europe in crisis.

with contributions by:
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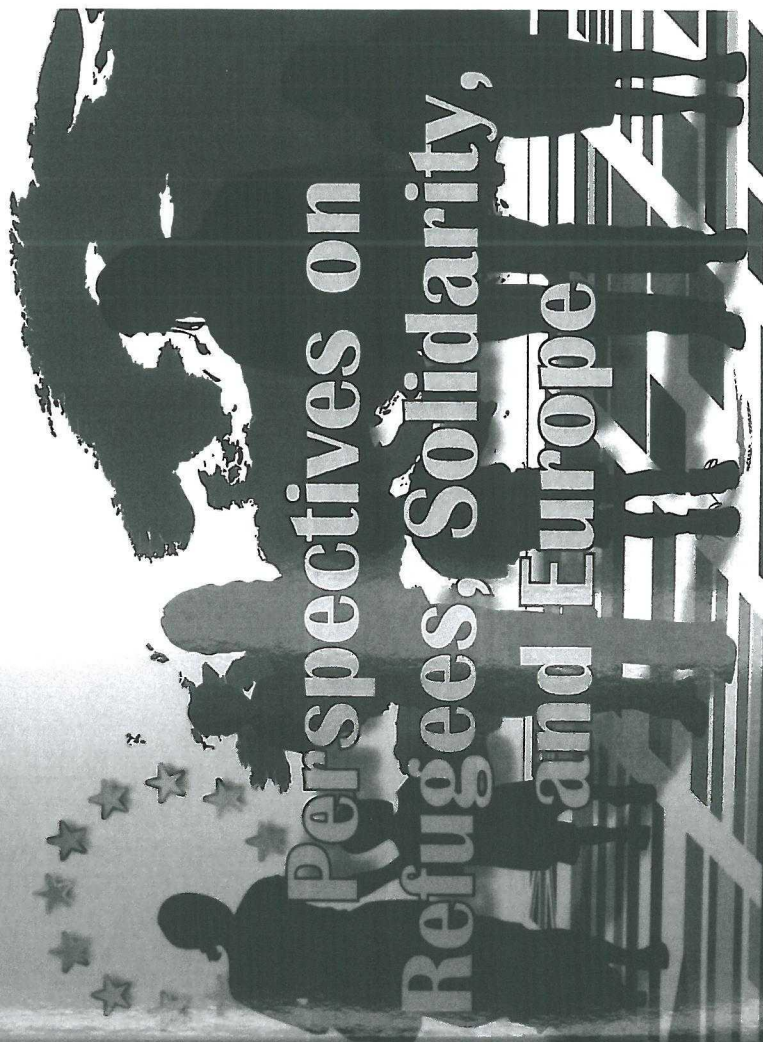
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Perspectives on Refugees, Solidarity, and Europe

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A European Crisis: Perspectives on Refugees, Europe, and Solidarity

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The theme of crisis punctuates this volume, either with reference to refugee migration of recent years or to Europe as a political project, as a geopolitical space, as a security community, as a common market and as a community of shared values. What is the nature of the crisis and why does the crisis narrative link refugees with Europe? This is the question leading the investigations offered within this collection of contributions from early- and mid-career scholars from across Europe and beyond. The purpose of this volume is to showcase a diverse range of perspectives and enhance our understanding of the complexity of the crisis narrative, as well as of the European condition that it describes.

1. Why Crises?

Crisis: refugee crisis; economic crisis; crisis of legitimacy. We seem to have taken for granted the veracity of these statements when applied to the European space and do not question the crisis narrative or its attachment to the governance of refugees, the economy, or the public sphere. But why should the theme of refugee migration be linked to European integration through the narrative of crisis? After all, refugees were conceived as deserving of international protection in Europe and within inherently European conditions—leading to the conception of the European integration project at around the same time. Governing refugee migration by formulating the highest standard of protection over the course of the second half of the 20th century had become an important aspect of European identity embedded in the European Union (EU) human rights dimension and enforced through Article 18 of the

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A Common Commitment: Civil Society and European Solidarity in the 'Refugee Crisis'

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Over the course of the so-called refugee crisis, solidarity has become a frequently invoked concept, and often been referred to as one of the underlying principles of European integration. In the struggle to find a common solution to what clearly emerged as a European problem—the failure to draft an appropriate joint response to the challenges presented by the conflict in Syria and its migratory consequences—the absence of solidarity was criticized. Criticisms referred to absent solidarity between European Union (EU) member-states. Italy and Greece as Mediterranean borderlands were the first countries to call upon a more solidary behaviour, while Germany and Austria joined the movement later on, when their territory became the most sought-after destination and/or travel route for refugees. When calling for solidarity, the EU member-states implied a 'problem' that needed to be addressed together. The reference was to a 'shared burden' of extraordinary weight that no single member-state can handle alone.

Unlike EU member-states, the representatives of NGOs and civil society activists did not refer to solidarity among member-states and did not see solidarity as a burden. To them, solidarity meant unity with the refugees. The notion of a person-centred solidarity also included a different interpretation of the situation, and a rejection of categorizing human beings as a 'burden'. Instead, civil society representatives speak of a sense of duty and regard helping refugees as a common commitment that should be shared by all and addressed transnationally through civil society action.

My paper aims to provide a comparative and contrasting view on the term solidarity as perceived by EU officials and member-state politicians, and by civil society organizations and activists. Solidarity is regarded by all actors as one of the core principles of the EU and as a core European value, but the recipients of solidarity and the extent of the concept differ significantly. An attempt at collecting different meanings and interpretations of solidarity, therefore, serves as the theoretical underpinning of this paper framed as a comparative evaluation. But the paper is focused on solidarity as seen through the eyes of European civil society activists. Their views and interpretations have been analysed on the basis of empirical data collected through an online questionnaire and through an analysis of interaction in an activist Facebook group appropriately titled 'Solidarity with Refugees'. I try to show that solidarity is viewed as centred around the human being and the individual, implying that it is the duty of each EU citizen to 'act in solidarity' towards refugees. I analyse personal definitions of solidarity and reasons for people to become involved in refugee activism (many activists had not been active politically or in NGOs before). Finally, the paper addresses the possibility of reconciling different ideas of solidarity, as well as a possible multi-layered concept of solidarity. I argue that the EU level and solidarity among member-states could also benefit from a vision of solidarity less centred on burden-sharing and more oriented towards a civic duty. This more positively connoted term may help to reframe public discourse and foster stronger commitment to 'act in solidarity'.

1. Solidarity—A Multidimensional Term

The term solidarity is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as 'unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.'[1] While this notion does not cover the multi-faceted aspects of what is understood by solidarity or solidary behaviour in refugee and migration issues, it lays out the basic meaning of the term: a feeling of togetherness or group-building, shared interests, and mutually supporting each other to fulfil these interests. Solidarity in these terms is invoked by both EU officials and member-state politicians on one side and civil society representatives

on the other side of the discourse alike. However, the recipients of solidarity and the actors involved are different.

Intra-EU Solidarity and 'Burden-Sharing'

The roots of the term solidarity as a subject of political analysis can be traced back to the workers' movements, and primarily to discussions about the welfare state, in which solidarity with those who had less. Solidarity's enabling power for societal cohesion was one of the core concepts. Even though it represents one of the underlying and unifying traits of modern nation-states and their redistributive capacities, solidarity has been looked at as a principle 'overcome' by postmodern social theory:

> Solidarity is a central dimension of social order and social conflict, yet it has largely been absent from influential theories of modern society. Most of the big thinkers, classical, modern and contemporary, have conceived prototypically modern relationships as either vertical or atomized. Modernization is thought to have smashed affectual and moral fellow-feeling: because of commodification and capitalist hierarchy (Marx), because of bureaucracy and individualistic asceticism (Weber), because of the growing abstraction and impersonality of the collective consciousness allows egoism and anomie (Durkheim). Postmodernity is typically seen as liquefying social ties and intensifying narcissistic individualism (Baumann); or as creating new forms of verticality, for example, the disciplinary cage (Foucault).[2]

Although it has been ignored, solidarity 'remains a central dimension of cultural, institutional and interactional life in contemporary societies.'[3] This assessment also holds true for the EU: in committing to common goals and values, a sense of community and identity is established, which in turn again serves as the basis for future shared projects. Solidarity can be witnessed as an underlying concept in many EU policies (e.g. regional and structural funding) and is also explicitly outlined as a guiding principle of the EU.

Solidarity is thus a vital provider of social cohesion in many areas, while immigration has often been regarded as weakening welfare state solidarity within the nation-state: cultural differences might be detrimental to the feeling of shared belonging[4]. The distinction between a 'we' that

belongs and a 'they' that does not belong is often fuzzy and difficult to make. However, at the EU level, the distinction between 'us' (EU-citizens) and 'them' (non-EU citizens, migrants and asylum seekers) is quite clear. This division also entails differing degrees of solidarity and differing demands for such measures, although recent political problems in the 'refugee-crisis' have shown that even intra-EU calls for solidarity sometimes remain unanswered. As migration and refugees are transnational issues that cannot be tackled on a national level, acting in solidarity not only eases the pressure on the states most affected by migratory movements, but also constitutes the only viable option to really address the problem coherently on an international level. However, instead of looking for a European solution for a European problem, nation-states are returning to nationalist policies. One of the reasons for this process could be that, as Will Kymlicka argues, the roots of welfare state solidarity lie in nationhood, and that alternative accounts of post-nationalist political order have not (yet) been fully successful.[5] In a difficult political climate, member-states have argued to be protecting their own countries first and foremost, often neglecting larger scale developments. Growing migratory pressure on member-states has led to a re-evaluation of this stance in some cases: German Chancellor Angela Merkel rejected a quota system in 2013, when Italy and Greece were the countries most 'burdened' by immigrant influx, only to call for the instalment of such provisions in 2015, when Germany had become the main refugee destination.

Even though the political commitment to solidarity has been patchy and often ineffective, it remains a specifically outlined principle of the EU Asylum and Migration Policy, and therefore acting in solidarity should be a guideline all member-states commit to. Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) mentions solidarity as one of the principles the EU is founded on[6], and article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that EU policies on border checks, asylum and immigration must be 'governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the member-states.'[7] This provision is necessary, as some member-states are bound to be more affected by immigrant

and refugee movements than others because of their geographical position (e.g. Italy and Greece).

While the wording speaks about a 'fair sharing of responsibility'[8] the implication is clearly a 'burden-sharing' mechanism, and member-states—and not refugees or migrants themselves—are the primary recipients of intra-EU solidarity. Iris Goldner Lang identifies four facets of solidarity in EU asylum and migration law: loyalty, trust, fairness, and necessity. Loyalty refers to the member-states fulfilling the obligations arising from their EU membership, adhering to EU primary and secondary law; trust constitutes the basis for the abolishment of inner-EU borders; fairness denotes the willingness of the member-states less affected by migratory movements to assist those in need of help and support, primarily those forming the external EU border; necessity claims that by helping member-states in need, other member-states work towards a more secure and stable EU.[9] However, as Goldner Lang notes, some of the concepts are clearly more represented than others; e.g. the Dublin System, whose rules do not allow for an even distribution of refugees and migrants across the EU member-states: 'The Dublin Regulation, with its "state of first entry' criterion as decisive for determining the member-state responsible for examining the asylum application, creates a burden-shifting rather than a burden-sharing mechanism.'[10] If 'fairness' and 'loyalty', the more normative factors, do not compel EU member-states to act in solidarity, the rational-choice logic of 'necessity' should, as no member-state will be able to tackle the issues of migration and asylum effectively when left alone (as outlined by the cases of Italy and Greece and their failure to properly register refugees).

In order to achieve a European policy approach, the European Council's Tampere Conclusions in 1999 stated that 'in the longer term, Community rules should lead to a common asylum procedure and a uniform status for those who are granted asylum throughout the Union.'[11] However, 18 years afterwards, it is still the member-states who process and govern asylum applications. The Court of Justice has taken on a stronger role, concluding, for example, on the case of Greece that the country faced a 'disproportionate burden'. This wording denotes a

focus on the impact of migration flows on the state, rather than on the asylum seeker, and [...] uses the term 'burden' to describe increased pressures upon the state—with asylum seekers thus viewed implicitly as a burden to national systems.[12]

Again, the notion of 'burden-sharing' is visible as the primary principle, which in effect securitizes asylum flows by viewing asylum seekers in a negative light.[13] According to Valsamis Mitsilegas, this definition as a 'burden' 'promotes a concept of solidarity which is state-centred, securitized and exclusionary.[14] 'State-centred' denotes that emphasis is placed on the interests of the state and not on those of the asylum-seeker, 'securitized' reflects the prevailing crisis mentality and looks at solidarity as an emergency management tool, and 'exclusionary' limits solidarity to solidarity between nation-state citizens, between EU citizens and between EU member-states, while third-country nationals are not mentioned.[15]

'Burden-sharing' as a terminology also already denotes a negative concept. A redrafting of the official discourse on solidarity could thus also be beneficial for member-state acceptance of EU redistribution mechanisms. The notion of third-country nationals as a 'burden' contributes to creating a homogeneous 'them' to be excluded from solidarity provisions and European societies. International law clearly defines who is eligible for asylum and who is not, but the distinction between refugees fleeing their homelands due to war and persecution and economic migrants is often blurred in public discourse and media coverage.

Even though the outline of who should be the recipients of protection is clear, the EU has not managed to come to a common solution regarding who should be providing this protection. Evangelia Tsourdi and Philippe De Bruycker criticize that

> the EU's efforts in the fields of solidarity are undercut by the fact that there has never been an objective assessment of what would be an equitable share of responsibility for each member-state. Therefore, any claim by a member-state that it is 'overburdened' cannot be objectively substantiated, and raises the suspicion among the others, who are also called on to carry part of the protection responsibility.[16]

Therefore, they propose a distinction between 'unwillingness to comply' and 'inability to comply' by objectively assessing the protection capacity of each member-state. Solidarity is again primarily viewed through the lens of 'burden-sharing', however, migrants' preferences should also be taken into account in possible future relocation tasks.

The European Commission frequently invokes solidarity as one of the founding principles of the EU, although the 'burden' perspective remains the dominant lens for the issue. In May 2016, the Commission discussed a so-called 'corrective fairness mechanism' which would allow refugees to be distributed across EU member-states to ease pressure on the first arrival points (e.g. Italy and Greece). Member-states refusing to participate in the redistribution system would then have to compensate with monetary contributions to other states accepting refugees.[17] A fine of €250,000 for each refugee that is refused resettlement could become a powerful tool in achieving compliance from Central and Eastern European Countries[18], if the proposal gains the needed support.

The 'corrective fairness mechanism' offered as a solidarity proposition again targets the member-states and not the refugees themselves—a 'burden-sharing' concept emphasizing the focus on intra-EU solidarity. In July 2016, the European Commission adopted plans to reform the Common European Asylum System with the so-called 'second reform package'. In order to harmonize asylum procedures, the Asylum Procedures Directive should be replaced with a Regulation, thus creating a directly applicable legal instrument allowing for common standards across EU member-states instead of relying solely on member-state implementation. The reform measures should streamline the asylum process, limiting it to six months or less, ensure common guarantees for asylum seekers (e.g. the right to a personal interview and free legal assistance), introduce sanctions for abuse or lack of cooperation in the asylum process, and harmonize the rules on safe countries.

The Qualification Directive should also be replaced with a Regulation, in order to create common standards for asylum seekers regardless of the country that processes their application. Finally, the Reception Conditions Directive should be reformed, e.g. to grant earlier access to the la-

bour market (after six months). European Commission First Vice President Frans Timmermans noted that 'the EU needs an asylum system which is both effective and protective, based on common rules, solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibilities', again underlining 'burden-sharing' notions as the primary framework for intra-EU solidarity.[19]

While the Commission focuses on an intra-EU solidarity and 'burden-sharing'-centred approach with regard to refugees, the European Parliament is revealed as the most open EU institution toward human rights issues. On 1 June 2016, the European United Left/ Nordic Green Left Parliamentary Group held a solidarity day in the European Parliament (EP), specifically addressing the importance of volunteers and their work in the refugee situation.[20] Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) made use of social media by answering questions on refugee issues posed by their Facebook followers.[21] Former EP President Martin Schulz had already called for a revision of the Dublin system and placing a stronger focus on solidarity in December 2015, by noting that 'European solidarity is about sharing responsibilities and leaving no-one alone.'[22]

The terminology of 'responsibility' also leans more toward the sense of 'solidarity as civic duty' employed by activists criticizing the approach of 'burden-sharing'. A 'civic duty' notion of solidarity could represent a more positively connoted term, also to be used to promote solidarity between member-states. The example of the European Parliament shows that solidarity concepts coined by civil society can make their way into the European institution and shape the political discourse on the issue.

In a 2015 working document, the European Parliament distinguishes between 'internal' and 'external' solidarity:

> Internal solidarity relates to the solidarity shown from one Member-state to another Member-state, or from the European Union as a whole towards one of its Member-states, or from EU citizens towards third country nationals present in the EU. External solidarity refers to solidarity by the EU towards those people, not on the territory of the EU, who are affected by war, persecution, hunger or violent conflicts in their country of origin, those who are at risk of losing their lives in makeshift

boats crossing the Mediterranean, and to solidarity with third countries that currently receive on their territories and in their communities huge numbers of refugees fleeing war, persecution and hunger in neighbouring countries.[23]

This definition explicitly includes third country nationals as recipients of solidarity, and also addresses solidarity with refugees already present in EU member-states, thus combining person-centred notions of inclusion and intra-EU solidarity. The European Parliament's inclusive approach to the concept could therefore fulfil a bridge-building function between official EU and civil society definitions of solidarity. Civil society notions of solidarity as a 'civic duty' could also be used in intra-European solidarity discourses, and help to replace 'burden-sharing' with a more positively viewed concept of common responsibility.

Civil Society and Solidarity—a Common Commitment

Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka take on solidarity as a set of attitudes and motivations, distinguishing between *civic solidarity* (defined as mutual tolerance; absence of prejudice; commitment to living together in peace; acceptance of people from diverse ethnicities, languages and religions as legitimate members of the community, as part of 'us'; openness to newcomers from diverse parts of the world), *democratic solidarity* (support for basic human rights and equalities; support for the rule of law and for democratic norms and processes; equal participation of citizens from all backgrounds) and *redistributive solidarity* (support for redistribution towards the poor and vulnerable groups; support for full access of people of all backgrounds, including newcomers, to core social programs). Their model proposes a step away from the focus on purely redistributive issues, to the focus on how different groups might compete for access to these redistributed funds (e.g. immigration seen as a 'danger' for citizens depending on welfare).

Migratory movements may impact all three dimensions of solidarity, as just institutions built on ideas of bounded solidarity require citizens to view themselves as an ethical community bound together by distinctive obligations to each other; increased diversity might make it harder to sustain this sense of shared identity.[24] New Social Movements could act

as champions for inclusive solidarity, as well as help to promote more inclusive identities and narratives, focusing more on a civic persona and less on nationality:

> Instead of seeing the cultural differences brought by immigration as a threat to national cohesion and identity, pro-migrant and antiracist activists define the nation as an open and universal sphere.[25]

By definition, newcomers and migrants should then also have access to this sphere and be involved in shaping its future form. Moving in a similar direction, Rachel Einwohner et al. look at the concept of active solidarity as

> an *active process* of deliberation, negotiation, and engagement between different social groups that collectively determine a movement's goals and mechanisms of political influence. [...] This process of negotiation may lead to the creation of a collective identity, but does not necessarily require shared identities a priori.[26]

In many cases of activist connection and interaction through social media and other channels, such processes of shared identity building become visible. As outlined in more detail in the case study below, many of the activists involved in pro-refugee initiatives come from very different backgrounds, and many have not been politically active before. The notion of taking action as a civic duty is highlighted in many of the interviews, and fits the description of active solidarity as 'an obligation to both create and be part of a community.'[27]

David Featherstone also rejects the notion of solidarity as a previously identified 'likeness': 'It can [...] as frequently be about the active creation of new ways of relating.'[28] The refugee situation can serve as a prime example of such new relations, as activists engage to lobby for a subject (refugees) entirely different from their own life situations. In doing so, they create new interactional structures and a sense of community.

Featherstone's characterization of solidarity as a practice that can be forged 'from below' and its refusal to stay within the political confines of the nation state also fit the dynamic of civil society groups in the so-called 'refugee crisis'.[29] Action is frequently taken at a grassroots level,

and transnationalization is one of the key concepts of activist lobbying. New and social media render shared action, coordination, and communication with groups in other countries easy. The transnational component of solidarity, a core aspect since its beginnings in the workers' movement, is thus enhanced by new technological and political possibilities.

The international character also implies 'uneven power relations and geographies'[30], another significant point in refugee aid and volunteer work relating also to the causes of migratory movements. Solidarity as an active process that is inherently international and driven from below is a fitting concept for transnational pro-refugee activism. To most activists, relating to people culturally different from themselves does not impede solidarity, but creates a new community structure explicitly including refugees and fellow European helpers as recipients of solidarity, while an exclusionary concept of solidarity as 'burden-sharing' is rejected. In relation to the European Parliament's discussion about a shared responsibility of 'acting in solidarity', solidarity has a strong 'civic duty' component; help is necessary and thus needs to be provided.

2. Solidarity has to be Lived: Examples from a Pro-Refugee Civil Society Group

After comparing the different theoretical notions of solidarity brought forward by the EU and civil society advocates, I now look at a case study of pro-refugee activists and their ideas about solidarity in more detail. The group '*Solidarität mit Flüchtlingen / Solidarietà con i Profughi*'[31] (Solidarity with Refugees) has been active on Facebook since 2014, and coordinates aid initiatives in the Autonomous Province of Bozen/ Bolzano, a territory located in Northern Italy close to the Austrian border.

The group started as a response to refugees passing through Italy trying to reach Austria or Germany, and the often desolate state they were in when waiting at local train stations. The first initiatives formed at the train stations of *Bozen/ Bolzano* (the province's capital) and Brenner/ Brennero, the border between Italy and Austria, where many refugees were blocked by police from continuing their journey. Conditions at the

border are difficult especially during winter time (due to the altitude of 1,370 m, temperatures are often low and snowfalls are frequent—weather that most of the refugees are not equipped for). The Brenner/ Brennero border is of symbolic value for the German-speaking minority population in the Bolzano Province, which had been part of Austria until 1918. Schengen and the abolishment of borders in 1998 were seen as a prime example of European integration as a positive force, and the possibility of Austria installing border controls and a fence in response to the refugee situation are viewed very negatively.

Civil Society Groups, e.g. the *Alexander Langer Foundation*, began to install a monitoring system at the border: providing basic care and clothing for the refugees, but also helping and translating in interactions with the police. Additionally, activists aimed to raise awareness for the situation and contacted local politicians about the issue. The numbers of refugees aiming to cross the border from Italy to Austria—although they first entered the EU in Italy and would thus be obliged to request asylum there under the Dublin III regulation—are increasing: in 2014, Austrian authorities stopped 4,408 people at the border, compared to 2,118 in 2013 and 580 in 2012.[32] The refugees had to wait at the Brenner/ Brennero border, in adverse conditions (e.g. heavy snowfalls in October 2014), which sparked a first wave of solidarity and volunteer work. Collections for clothing and food donations were initiated, and the Facebook group '*Winterhilfe für Flüchtlinge*' (Winter Help for Refugees) was founded and later re-named to '*Solidarität mit Flüchtlingen—Solidarietà con i profughi*'.

In 2014, '*Von Lampedusa an den Brenner*' (From Lampedusa to Brenner) was held as a transnational solidarity convention in the framework of the *Global Migrants Action Day*—a joint event between pro-refugee activist groups from Italy and Austria. The need for a 'European answer' to the refugee problem was one of the main claims made by civil society groups from both sides of the border. For the *Tag des Transnationalen MigrantInnen Streiks* (Day of Transnational Migrant Strike) held on 1 March 2015, 200 activists from Italy, Austria, Germany and Switzerland came together at the border and commonly initiated the petition '*Ein*

anderes Asylsystem ist möglich' (Another Asylum System Is Possible), calling for more legal possibilities to enter Europe and a more humane treatment of refugees.[33]

The solidarity activism thus began at the train stations, and the people doing monitoring work at the border informed civil society volunteers via the Facebook group. The members of the group then started to organize volunteer work at the train stations, connecting and coordinating through social media and mobile applications (mainly *Whatsapp*). They also demanded answers from local politicians, and achieved the instalment of a 'coordinating table' between volunteers, civil society organizations and local authorities. The volunteer group—as also reflected by my survey data—is very diverse, consisting of different linguistic groups, societal backgrounds, age groups, etc. Information evenings were organized across the province to inform the population about the refugee situation and possibly increase mobilization.

The volunteers have taken up the name of '*Binario 1—Gleis 1*' (Platform 1), from the place at the Bozen/ Bolzano railway station where they first met. As there is also an increasing number of asylum seekers living in '*Aufnahmezentren*' (reception centres) in the Province of Bozen/Bolzano—700 in 2015—civil society work is also needed in a variety of contexts outside of the railway stations.[34] Activists have taken up the organization of events in which refugees can meet with the local population, sports events, cooking get-togethers, trips to show them their new homeland, etc. These activities are coordinated and advertised through the Facebook group, which serves as an easily accessible 'port of entry' for people wishing to engage in volunteer work.

Not all of the group members are in fact active helpers; many also use the place to discuss possible donations or political gatherings that could be of value. As of May 2017, the group has 2,689 members from all linguistic groups, some also from outside the Province (e.g. refugee activists from Austria and Germany). The group description states its aim as 'helping the people being pulled from the trains *in* Bozen/ Bolzano and Brenner/Brennero with small measures like providing food and drinks'[35] and encourages interested people to check the volunteer schedule or inquire about donation possibilities. It also mentions work possibilities

for asylum seekers or recognized refugees as working is vital to build a future, and it is difficult for people to access the job market even though they possess the legal prerequisites.'[36] While mobilizing activities are a frequent topic, the group does not regard itself as a place for political discussion, but as a forum for organizing, coordinating and facilitating hands-on help. The transnational component and the need for 'acting in solidarity' at the European level are frequently invoked. However, the vision of solidarity differs from the 'burden-sharing' approach outlined by most EU officials and member-state politicians and instead refers to refugees as the recipients of solidarity and to helping as a 'civic duty', following a similar concept of solidarity to the European Parliament.

The notion of 'duty' and solidarity as something that needs 'to be lived' was also one of the prime topics mentioned in the interview data. An online questionnaire, available in three languages (German—Italian—English) was drafted, made available in the group via a link and accompanied by a post explaining what the collected data would be used for, and that the participants would remain anonymous. The first part of the questionnaire related to demographic questions (gender, highest level of education, linguistic group adherence), while the second part addressed previous social and political activism (active in a civil society context or other organizations, active in a political context, holder of a political mandate). Finally, the third part consisted of open questions regarding reasons for becoming active, the term solidarity in the refugee crisis, what it meant to people and their work, what the main challenges are, and how they see solidarity in Europe.

The majority of respondents declared to belong to the German-speaking linguistic group[37], which also corresponds to the analysis of interaction inside the group: most posts are in German, but bilingual communication can also be found. Interestingly, all respondents hold a university degree; a further comparison of all group members in regard to educational achievement could thus provide interesting data. In the small sample analysed (n=11), having a university background might have instigated more openness towards 'outside' research. Many respondents mentioned that they were active in the *Grüne—Verdi—Verc* · Party

(Green Party), but are not holding and have not in the past held a political mandate. One group member was active in the Evangelical Church. It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents had not been active in civil society organizations before, and that their engagement as a refugee activist constituted the first instance of civil society action for them. Party alignment along the left-wing axis is not surprising; however, the Green Party in the Bozen/Bolzano Province constitutes an anomaly in the South Tyrolean Party spectrum because it specifically highlights its interethnic character. The SVP (*Südtiroler Volkspartei*) as the main political party claims to represent the interests of German- and Ladin-speaking minority populations, although this strict policy is slowly changing as well. A focus on inclusive cultural approaches is therefore visible also in the party choice.

Motivations for becoming active vary, but all convey the message that it is a necessity and a duty to help:

> I've been touched by the situation of the people at the railway stations…I think it's a situation that concerns all of us, especially since we as Europeans are partially accountable for this situation…every human being has a right to a home, humanity, dignity, and maybe I can contribute to that'; 'it's logical to help if you have the chance.[38]

An approach centred on aid and not on empowerment, and the lack of labour market integration plans were mentioned as pitfalls, along with a slow and unresponsive political system and the uncertain future for the refugees. Cultural conflicts (e.g. especially the role of female volunteers) were also addressed. Positive experiences were mainly related to the personal level of interaction with refugees.

When asked for their own definitions of solidarity, the notion of supporting refugees as a 'common commitment' or a 'civic duty' for all Europeans prevailed throughout the answers. First, respondents were asked about their own general definition of solidarity: 'empathy, understanding'; 'compensation of unequal life chances and resources', 'getting engaged to raise awareness for those worse off than us.'[39] In relation to the refugee crisis, solidarity was defined as the necessary donation of time, money and other resources to help refugees, but a broader context was mentioned as well: 'thinking about what we really need, maybe donate

some of what we do not need, think about which effects we cause with our behaviour, in a human, economic and global political way.'[40] Solidarity was directed mainly at the refugees themselves, and on a smaller scale also to other refugee activists. Intra-European solidarity appeared in the context of solidarity between activists in different EU member-states, and the common duty to 'give what my next of kin needs, as much as I can, without doing damage to myself.'[41] Again, the sense of solidarity as a 'commitment' and a 'responsibility' strongly surfaces. It is mainly viewed as a concept stating that the EU and its citizens should be 'acting in solidarity' towards the refugees, and as not intra-EU solidarity of member-states trying to fairly split a 'burden' or a 'problem'.

Through European transnational interaction with other activists, the international character of solidarity is also upheld—solidarity is not something confined to the nation-state or even Europe, but solidarity is seen as a necessity imperative for behaviour towards all human beings, including refugees. The sense of responsibility or 'civic duty' also upheld by the European Parliament could represent common ground between civil society activists and official EU institutions, and foster a shift in public discussion from negative 'burden-sharing' to positively connoted 'common commitment' discourses.

Conclusion:
Towards a Multi-Level Approach to Solidarity?

Discussions on a fairer distribution, resettlement and quota systems have been dominant in the public discourse about refugee issues, while a thorough debate about the meaning of the term solidarity and its concrete practical implications is still lacking. The Commission and EU member-state officials use it as a different concept compared to the European Parliament, and civil society activists present their own notions as well. Solidarity is outlined in the EU Treaties as one of the core values of the EU and as the principle that should govern all policies in the field of asylum. It can therefore not be dismissed as a merely political concept, but also holds legal implications.

However, there is no clear definition of what constitutes solidary behaviour in the so-called 'refugee crisis': while civil society organizations lobby for a person-centred definition and for the extension of solidarity to third-country-nationals, many EU member-states even reject intra-EU solidarity right now. Whether possible fining systems can support or even foster fair-sharing mechanisms among the member-states remains to be seen, and it does not present an immediate strategy for action.

Solidarity as confined to the nation-state is a concept that runs counter to the term's inherent pretence of internationalism, and it appears to be a 'lowest-common-denominator' approach of confining solidarity to those most alike ourselves. As the circle of behaviour in solidarity, e.g. those that are included in a common 'we', appears to decrease, nationally based solutions creating a separated and protected nation-state may create an illusion of new-found safety, but fail to commonly address an international problem with the appropriate means. The European Parliament has presented a notion of solidarity as a 'civic duty', a vision of the term also compatible with how civil society activists define it. A re-orientation of official discourse from a 'burden-sharing' to a 'civic duty' approach could also foster intra-European solidarity, by declaring it a responsibility to 'act in solidarity' towards other member-states, a definition in line with the EU's basic principles and its treaty base on asylum and migration.

Besides the dimension of solidarity, or how 'far' it should go in both spatial and protective terms, the recipients of solidarity are also an issue for discussion. Civil society mainly talks about refugees as recipients of solidarity, with a smaller-scale focus on solidarity with other European activists. The volunteers are primarily interested in making a 'common commitment' to helping those who come from contexts of great distress. For the European Commission and member-state governments, solidarity must be implemented inside the EU for a 'burden-sharing' system to work—'fairness' comes in as an important notion, every member-state should make their contribution, and those whose behaviour is judged to be unfair should be fined.

The principle of 'necessity', describing that a common European approach is needed to tackle the problem effectively, should be highlighted more strongly—solidary action is not only important for equal responsibility on the issue, but it is also a prerequisite for finding a shared solution to an international development. The European Parliament aims for an inclusive approach encompassing both 'internal' and 'external' solidarity. In this definition, solidarity appeals to a number of levels and recipients of solidarity, also uncovering the multi-layered structure solidary behaviour may take on.

A multi-layered concept of solidarity may be the appropriate response to the different approaches taken on at different levels of government and civil society. Not unlike civil society activists, the European Parliament also sees solidarity as a 'responsibility', a 'duty' which has to be fulfilled. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are particularly interesting in this regard, as inclusive and exclusionary concepts clash both within political discourse and within EU institutions. Focusing on the more positively connoted concept of 'responsibility' instead of 'burden' could also facilitate intra-European solidarity; additionally, the character of collaboration and solidary action as a necessity should also be stressed.

The members of the Facebook group do not confine the notion of solidarity to likeness or common goals, and take on a concept of active solidarity, which forges new alignments through connection and interaction. Solidarity is a necessity, something that is not largely reflected upon in terms of inclusion or exclusion, or who should be the beneficiary of behaviour in solidarity—it has a more emphatic, personal connotation of a 'common commitment' being made to help. Reconciling 'burden-sharing' and 'common commitment' approaches to solidarity could prove to be difficult, as there is no consensus on the inclusion—exclusion axis and criteria, and different 'targets' for solidarity are identified.

However, both approaches are needed and necessary to address the issue at different levels: without a solution on intra-EU solidarity and general political agreement on the basic terms of collaboration, transna-

tional civil society will be confronted with an increasingly difficult environment for its activities. A notion of solidarity as a 'civic duty' could positively influence intra-European solidarity as well, and help to reframe public discourse from a negative and problem-oriented discussion to more strongly relying on solidarity as a basic principle of the EU, to be applied first and foremost between member-states, but also to be extended to third-country nationals. A more open and inclusive definition of solidarity as a multi-layered concept with different levels of action (encompassing intra-European solidarity and civil society solidarity) could help to avoid a 'race-to-the-bottom' with nationhood and the nation-state as the only, exclusionary 'we' providing solidarity.

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