



D5.1 – Where do the Lies Lie: Analysing Post-truth Migration Discourses in European and Member State Parliamentary Debates

RECLAIM Work Package 5: (Lead: Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

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1. Executive summary

This report investigates how post-truth discourses on migration and border security are constructed, circulated, and embedded within parliamentary debates across six EU member states: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain, as well as the European Parliament. It examines how political actors deploy emotionally charged, epistemically weak narratives that shape public perception and influence institutional outcomes.

Grounded in the assumption that post-truth discourse must be analysed not only in social media but at the core of democratic decision-making, this study centres on parliamentary debates as institutional arenas where discourse shapes law, policy, and public understanding. Conducted within WP5 of the RECLAIM project, the analysis applies a shared methodology of Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) to investigate how post-truth discourses on migration and borders unfold within formal democratic settings. A total of 60 parliamentary debates, held between 2011 and 2024 and selected around key migration-related focusing events, were analysed and coded using MAXQDA software and a unifying codebook developed by the research team.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first, discursive patterns were identified in individual parliamentary speeches by isolating claims, evidence, and warrants on migration and border governance, using the Toulmin model of argumentation. Coding categories enabled the identification of post-truth tropes within parliamentary debates, allowing us to capture key characteristics of the ‘post-truth condition’ as manifested in political discourse. These tropes were operationalised through four interrelated features: (1) the use of intense emotional appeals and personalised attacks, (2) the undermining of science, evidence, and democratic institutions, (3) reliance on ‘common sense’, self-evident truths, or the public as ultimate arbiters of fact, and (4) rhetorical strategies that either disregard or colonise truth. In the second stage, these tropes were traced into storylines: structured thematic threads reflecting dominant framings of migrants and migration.

The analysis then examined their discursive prominence (structuration) and policy relevance (institutionalisation). This enabled a comparative evaluation of post-truth embeddedness across three levels: trivial, where tropes remain marginal or isolated; popular, where they circulate across discourse coalitions and become rhetorically normalised; and deep, where they structure dominant framings and become institutionalised in policymaking. This typology constitutes a methodological innovation of the study, offering a comparative framework to evaluate how post-truth tropes influence political discourse and institutional outcomes.

Findings show that migration discourses imbued with post-truth tropes have shifted from peripheral actors to mainstream parliamentary rhetoric. Identity-driven and securitised discourses often eclipse evidence-based, rights-oriented deliberation. Yet, moments of discursive resilience persist, particularly where technocratic, legal, or humanitarian frameworks continue to shape the debate. By analysing parliamentary debates as structured and strategic discursive arenas, this report demonstrates how parliaments function not only as sites of political contestation but also as vehicles through which post-truth becomes embedded in policymaking. It offers a critical perspective on how post-truth gains authority from within, highlighting the rhetorical mechanisms that increasingly shape migration policymaking in Europe.

Understanding this process is critical to identifying the conditions under which evidence-based policymaking can persist, and the vulnerabilities through which it may be eroded. It underscores the urgency of defending deliberative integrity in an increasingly polarised and emotionally charged political landscape and contributes to the broader objective of reclaiming liberal democracy in a postfactual age.

2. Introduction

Not even a decade after the Brexit vote and Trump's first election victory, post-truth has moved from a mere addition to the political dictionary (Oxford Dictionaries' 2016 word of the year) to a disturbingly accurate description of contemporary politics. Discourses imbued with post-truth tropes are deeply influencing political debates, blurring the lines between fact-based arguments and post-truth claims. This is all too evident in the political discourses on migration and asylum, which help shape social and political understandings of the national Self and the Other. Discourses on migration often thus get "high-jacked" by political entrepreneurs through 'debate expansion' (Favell, 2001), going from a question of technical order to one of fundamental, symbolic importance of culture, norms and, importantly, security. What ensues is an entrenchment of group identities, proliferation of fear and sharpening of polarisation.

Polarisation has come to define a growing number of contemporary political arenas, apparent in the proliferation of popular and academic reflections on this in the last years (see, for example, 'Why We are Polarised' by Ezra Klein in the American contexts (2020)). In the area of migration, the axis of polarisation is often seen through the dichotomy of the humanitarian-securitisation frame (Bello & Léonard, 2023), wherein liberal political actors have favoured humanitarian approaches to migration, while illiberal ones have leaned towards populist, security-driven policies (Huysmans, 2006; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2018; Lahav & Messina, 2024). However, in a securitized landscape, with war on the European continent, increased global migratory pressures and weaponisation tactics such as on the north-eastern border of the European Union, the lines between liberal and illiberal have blurred, leaning towards securitised discourses and policy outcomes (Niemann & Zaun, 2018; Stępką, 2022). In this uncertain and volatile setting, discourses on how different groups of migrants are perceived, what threats they carry, what migration entails for national and European identity, security and the future, have become increasingly acrimonious (Vaughan-Williams, 2021). Representatives from both extremes of the political spectrum, as well as mainstream parties pandering to more radical outliers of their voting base, have started to embrace post-truth tactics. As our findings below show, politicians from across the political spectrum galvanise support amongst their electoral base by using what we call post-truth tropes: these include data manipulation and decontextualization, distancing themselves from evidence-based policymaking and undermining the role of experts and epistemic communities, to mention a few.

We contend that to better understand this process of 'mainstreaming of post-truth', one should look beyond social media, where disinformation is omnipresent, and focus on the centre of democratic policy-making processes, namely parliamentary debates. The presence and use of post-truth tropes at the heart of representative democracies' deliberative pyramid provides a clearer indication of the strength and pervasiveness of postfactual politics. The research on which this report is based therefore had as its aim to unravel the complexities of parliamentary debates on migration and asylum in Poland, Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Spain and in the European Parliament, looking specifically into the patterns, style and (re)production of post-truth tropes.

2.1 Defining post-truth

One of the challenges of post-truth politics is its conceptual elusiveness; the concept remains inherently vague, encompassing a broad spectrum of behaviours and tactics that defy precise categorization. Our understanding builds on Newman's definition of post-truth politics as a distinctive style where traditional reverence for objective truth is diminished, leading to the erosion of its 'symbolic authority' (2019). Post-truth arises as a consequence of postfactualism, wherein the very notion of truth becomes unattainable due to the lack of agreed-upon standards for determining shared facts (MacMullen 2020), challenging the foundations of democratic deliberation. **In order to move this discussion forward, we propose a three-level approach to analysing the embeddedness of post-truth tropes in politics, which provides a**

clearer and more nuanced understanding of its different scales and types. In our analytical framework, **trivial post-truth embeddedness** disrupts political discourse without broader institutionalization and wider acceptance by the key political actors (e.g., isolated claims like “migrants eat pets” which are generally ignored); **popular post-truth embeddedness** is reflected in post-truth tropes that gain traction within discourse coalitions, spreading across party lines and becoming a normalised, or popularised, part of the debate (discourse structuration); **deep post-truth embeddedness** involves post-truth imbued storylines or narratives that shape policy action, deeply restructuring socio-political perceptions of truth on issues such as migration. In this way, our framework highlights how certain post-truth tropes become embedded into mainstream political debates within particular political and social contexts. A diachronic and comparative approach helps to assess how these structures gain consensus and influence policy across different country contexts.

2.2 Objectives

In order to investigate how post-truth tropes have penetrated parliamentary debates on migration and borders and to what extent it they been utilized by different political actors, we address the following questions:

1. How is post-truth discourse reproduced in parliamentary debates on migration and borders?
2. How are post-truth tropes found in claims, evidence and assumptions introduced into the debates?
3. What kind of storylines (narratives) emerge in parliamentary discourses and how are they promoted by political actors?
4. How prominent and pervasive are these storylines?
5. How and to what extent are storylines imbued with post-truth tropes institutionalized into policy frameworks?

In order to answer these questions, the research within WP5 developed **a novel approach to Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) to explore how and to what extent post-truth tropes are (re)produced in the debates on migration and border security in the EU, Polish, French, German, Austrian, Italian, and Spanish parliaments.** In its first stage, the analysis focuses on the identification of post-truth tropes. Building on the Toulmin model of argumentation, we first isolate: 1) claims; 2) evidence; and 3) warrants (underlying normative assumptions) on migration governance and migrants, isolating those utterances that reflect post-truth tropes outlined in the methodology section below. In the second stage, we analyze how the post-truth tropes we have identified align (or not) into stable storylines, examining their prominence (discourse structuration), political promoters (discourse coalitions), and institutionalization in policy frameworks (Hajer 2002a, b). In this way, we can provide evidence on and discuss how different scales of post-truth discourse embeddedness (i.e., trivial, popular, and deep) have penetrated parliamentary discourse and helped shape policies in the selected EU member states. The study focuses on key parliamentary debates related to migration and border security in the years 2011 to 2024. The selection of the debates is context-specific and aligns with specific migration-related “focusing events” that prompted the most heated discussions in parliaments leading up to and after the so-called migration crisis of 2015/16.

2.3 Structure of the report

After the introductory chapter presented here, **Section 2** of the report outlines the methodology and analytical framework of the project. We explain the particularity of analysing parliamentary debates in the selected case studies, as well as sampling techniques used for selecting the debates for the data analysis. The project used Argumentative Discourse Analysis as a guiding method, which is outlined and embedded in an understanding of discourse theory. The operationalisation of scales and structure of post-truth are

presented through a detailed outline of the coding process. **Section 3** consists of an outline of the development of migration and asylum policies in the European context in the period studied between 2011-2025. This outline provides an overview of the critical junctures or ‘focusing events’ at the European level in reference to policy frameworks and their significance. The aim is to show the development of certain policy trajectories that the European Union has taken vis a vis migration and asylum as a background to the discourses on migration that are later analysed and interpreted. **Section 4** provides the findings from the main analysis within the Work Package, namely the outcome of a multi-layered discourse analysis of 60 parliamentary debates from almost 15 years of sittings and across 6 case studies in Europe. The findings are organised into three analytical levels: trivial, popular and deep post-truth embeddedness. We offer an outline of each of the scales and examples from the case studies analysed, including chosen quotes of individual Members of Parliament and the contextualisation of the post-truth within them. **Section 5** offers a discussion of the relevance of the research, including a reflection on the conditions in which post-truth thrives as well as the nature of post-truth tropes within political discourses themselves. The report finishes with a reflection on the gaps filled and future ways forward for research.

3. Research methodology and analytical framework

3.1 Case selection

This study relies on the analysis of parliamentary debates on migration in five national parliaments (Poland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Austria) as well as in the European Parliament.

The countries chosen for the study belong to different geographical categories: Western Europe (Germany), Southern Europe (Spain and Italy), Central Europe (Austria) and Eastern Europe (Poland). While it was not the intention of this study to delve into East-West or North-South divisions within the EU, the selection of countries from different geopolitical locations allowed us to take a cross-sectional look at countries with different degrees of experience and societal attitudes resulting from the subsequent waves of (forced) migrants coming to Europe over the last two decades. This allowed us to take into account diversity of perspectives and positions informed by divergent national interests.

The choice of the EU as a separate case was dictated by a double rationale. Firstly, addressing the necessity to forge a common action plan over the 2015 Refugee crisis, the EU has made steps to provide a common policy framework of which the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, passed in 2024, is but the last in a series of measures which have become a source of heated debates in national parliaments and the European Parliament alike. Secondly, the European Parliament has become an arena where many voices representing divergent national positions and interests within the EU have clashed. Those debates have been found to exemplify what Hooghe and Marks (2009) describe as *constraining dissensus*, highlighting how identitarian cleavages became politicized not only between member states but also within them (Ferrara and Kriesi, 2022).

3.2 Parliamentary debates – the corpus of study

The dataset for this study of political discourse consists of transcripts from parliamentary debates. There are three reasons why parliamentary debates were chosen as the study’s corpus. The first refers to the unique attributes and features of parliamentary debates that set them apart from other types of public debates. Arguably, parliamentary exchange as “[t]he paradigmatic format of debate ensures that all possible opinions can be uttered, although within the bounds of the rules and procedures (Wiesner et al. 2017: 16). Critical components of parliamentary debates are that they abide by formal rules that all participants agree to comply with, their emphasis on equal speaking rights for all members of parliament, and their foundation in pluralism and thus in an acceptance of multiple and often contradictory perspectives

on a given issue. These norms that form the bedrock of the culture of parliamentary debates ensure that all parties can express their views on the agenda and suggest items for debate. Hence, the very act of agreeing on what to debate signals a shared recognition of the political relevance of the issue at hand and therefore also a shared understanding of what is political in the first place (Wiesner et al. 2017: 29). Since parliaments are a true agora for public deliberation, the study drawing from parliamentary speeches allows us not only to analyze the arguments exposed, but also to capture emotions and reactions of the audience that is composed of other MPs representing different views and interests.

Secondly, parliaments as ‘strong publics’ that not only debate, but also decide (Fraser 1990), play a fundamental role in the policy-making process. The analysis of such debates through the prism of the use of post-truth tropes may bring important insights for our understanding of the contemporary post-truth condition. To put it differently, while the presence of post-truth claims on social media is undeniable, the presence of post-truthiness in the parliament, at the level of claims or evidence, would mean that we are witnessing a significant quality change that does in fact posit an existential threat to liberal democracy. This is because parliamentary interactions tend to be highly regulated – both formally and informally – by way of tradition and established practices and patterns that effectively constrain the freedom of what each participant in a debate can actually say. As Wiesner et al. (2017: 16) highlight, even though “parliamentarians have the free mandate as well as parliamentary privilege, they still have to be careful to avoid being seen as using ‘unparliamentary language’.” If this ensemble of constraints on unwanted behaviour can no longer prevent the frequent utterance of post-truth tropes, then pluralist parliamentary democracy is threatened at its core. What is more, the wider public, the demos, also expect parliamentary debates to abide by certain standards and to inherently differ from – and be a model for – other forms and fora of public debate. Thirdly, through the consistent adoption of parliamentary debates as the core source of data across all the cases, we allow for cross-national comprehensive analysis.

The debates were chosen considering the country specific context. We adopted a broad timeframe extending from the 2010s until 2024, and in each case, we accounted for focusing events which were relevant in each national context but differed across national cases. We also considered the specificities of parliamentary processes, which allowed the most appropriate selection of debates. As a result the corpus included 60 parliamentary debates in total, comprising of 10 debates in Italy, 10 in Austria, 12 in Germany, 12 in Poland, 8 in Spain and 10 in the European Parliament. In most cases plenary debates were analysed. Spain was the only country case in which alongside plenary debates, debates in parliamentary commissions working on the issues of migration were also included.

3.3 Adapting argumentative discourse analysis

The study is grounded in a (post)structuralist understanding of language, which views discourse not merely as a reflection of social practices but also as a powerful force that shapes social reality (Rasiński, 2017: 36). Consequently, we define discourses as “an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories” that construct meaning and are reproduced through discursive practices (Hajer, 2006: 67). It is within discourse that material objects as well as more abstract notions become comprehensible. Talking about migration gives it meaning, influencing its definition and place in society. Thus, knowledge and reality are constituted through discourse, where language does not just reflect reality but creates it.

The main methodological approach builds on Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA), here used to explore how elements of post-truth manifest and are contested in parliamentary debates on migration and border security. It allows us to examine the ways political actors within the parliament (re)produce post-truth claims, (mis)use evidence and underlying logics (if any) to promote their ideas about migrants and migration. The approach allows for an in-depth analysis **of emerging storylines which are imbued with**

elements of post-truth, their prominence (discourse structuration), the political actors who promote them (discourse coalitions), and their eventual institutionalization within policy frameworks (Hajer, 2002a).

In this study, Toulmin's model of argumentation serves as a framework for studying the internal structure of arguments (Dutilh Novaes, 2022). It allows to identify fundamental constituent components of arguments such as:

- Declarative and/or prescriptive claims: main assertion or a statement the speaker wishes the audience to believe (e.g. "we should get rid of all migrants" or "stop providing welfare to migrants") (Parsons, 2007).
- Evidence/Grounds: supporting data, observations, examples (e.g., "they eat pets, some people have seen it" or "we have data proving that they cost more in social benefits than they contribute to our budget").
- Warrants: assumptions which could be grounded in academic knowledge and science or even political, philosophical or religious beliefs. Warrants glue arguments together, giving them specific logical underpinnings (e.g. Assumptions about sources of valid evidence). Warrants can be explicitly stated by the speaker but also can be implicit and "obvious" to an extent that does not require stating (e.g., "migrants constitute a danger to our way of life" or "migrants harm our economy") (Karbach, 1987:82).

ADA highlights how arguments contribute to **broader post-truth imbued storylines**, which simplify complex issues into familiar and digestible narratives (Hajer 2006). Here, storylines, which are in essence an amalgamation of arguments, help stabilize (post-truth) discourse by providing a sense of structure, coherence and logic. They introduce a plot, villains, victims, protagonists, etc. They may be (re)produced by a single political actor but often gain traction through so called **discourse coalitions**: loose alliances of actors who, despite differing motives, sustain and spread similar arguments, co-creating (post-truth) storylines (Hajer 2002b). Even political groups that officially reject post-truth claims and tropes may inadvertently reinforce them by aligning with post-truth styled grammar, tactics and logic of argumentation. In this way, they can be unwittingly joining a discursive coalition that contributes to post-truth discourses. Further, the approach focuses on discourse structuration and institutionalization. **Structuration** occurs when a particular claim becomes an obligatory reference point in discussions, even if its accuracy is disputed (e.g., "we cannot be certain all migrants are safe"). Once embedded, these claims influence policy narratives and may become perceived as "common sense" (Hajer 2006). **Institutionalization** occurs when post-truth narratives transition from discourse to policy action, such as local restrictions targeting migrant communities based on unfounded fears.

By applying ADA to parliamentary settings, this study examines how arguments serve as vehicles for post-truth, how storylines provide stability to discourse, how coalitions sustain post-truth claims, and how these narratives gain legitimacy and policy relevance. This framework offers a critical perspective on the mechanisms through which political discourse shapes public understanding and institutional decision-making in the context of migration and border security.

3.4 Operationalising post-truth in parliamentary debates on migration

3.4.1 Coding for post-truth

In the preparation and the development of codes, we took both a deductive and inductive approach to operationalising post-truth tropes, using two levels of analysis. On the **first level**, the Argumentative Discourse Analysis framework was used to code for arguments (made up of claims, evidence and warrants)

and then broader storylines within migration debates. Each case study used the same format within their analysis, identifying claims, evidence and warrants within emerging storylines, which then were grouped according to themes within discourses. Guiding themes between humanitarianism and securitisation were used in the first instance and then developed according to case studies. In some cases a solidarity theme became apparent (Italy), in others externalization emerged (EP, Italy), as well as different strands of humanitarianism: help them at home (Poland); no migrant is illegal (Spain); human rights as guiding principle (Germany). Securitisation-centred themes became dominant in debates across the case studies from 2020 onwards, producing storyline threads such as: Migration/migrants are an existential threat to our way of life; the EU / left has let illegal migration run rampant; migrants as trojan horses of hybrid warfare, infiltration. Each case study coded for arguments through which dominating storylines (composed of arguments) emerged and changed across the timeframe analysed.

On the **second level** of analysis, we operationalised the theoretical discussion on the post-truth condition into categories of post-truth characteristics (operationalised as tropes) that we observed in the data. This was done in conjunction with an open coding technique, allowing for the data to enrich the descriptive categories. Four categories emerged from both the theoretical framework and open coding that we outline below.

1. *Emotional appeal and personalized attacks*

Coding for heightened emotions and personal or group-based attacks within debates is a natural starting point, given the close relationship observed between populism and post-truth (Conrad et al, 2023). In the coding process, we were looking for those arguments in which the intensity of negative emotions and personalised attacks dominated the discourse, substituting evidence and merits of the arguments themselves. The **emotions** that were commonly coded were:

- I. *shame* (in the form of shaming, blaming, and self-criticism)
- II. *anger* (in the form of shouts, threats, verbal attacks, inflammatory language, burst of outrage)
- III. *anxiety, fear* (in the form of fearmongering, foreboding, emotional manipulation)

Attacks were coded in a variety of ways depending on the case study. Nonetheless, three main categories can be distinguished:

- I. *Personal, ad homonym attacks*: (attacking an opponent's supposed character rather than focusing on the substance of the debate. Ex. You are a liar!).
- II. *Group-identity based attacks*: (attacking a person or group based on their affiliations, ex. political, religious, ideological, cultural).
- III. *Attacks against migrants and perceived migratory phenomena*: (ex. Against the Islamisation of Europe, against perfidious migrants).

The codes above are not mutually exclusive; they often go together and strengthen the post-truth character of the argument. It is important to note that one emotive remark does not make a statement post-truth – it is the overall argument and its relation to the underlying storylines within a debate that determine the quality and embeddedness of post-truth tropes.

2. *Relativization of science, weakening of the information sphere and undermining democratic institutions*

The second coding category adheres to a central aspect of the post-truth condition, namely the challenge to scientific, evidence-based knowledge production. This comes in a myriad of forms, from challenging evidence-based policies, undermining expert authorities and research, contesting evidence or the use of pseudo-evidence. **It is important to note that we were not fact-checking evidence or ascertaining the validity of certain forms of scientific authority or research-based claims.** At the same time, as migration researchers, we had a natural propensity to identify statements that were misleading or factually incorrect. What we were interested in coding were the claims made on science, evidence, and forms of knowledge production as well as statements *about* ‘facts’ and ‘the truth’. *How* these topics were debated could provide useful information on their status. Coding categories that emerged in relation to **science and information** were:

- I. *Claims on the truth / facts* (the truth or false statements of others, undermining or support of facts, claims of disinformation, fake news).
- II. *Attacks on or dismissal of ‘elite’ or ‘establishment’ knowledge production / evidence*
- III. *Attacks on or dismissal of experts* (researchers, advocacy groups, think tanks, high-level policy-makers)

When members of parliament explicitly decontextualised certain events, dismissed evidence that was presented within the debate, and used cherry-picking tactics to mislead or persuade, these were additionally flagged, coded and checked for accuracy. These will be discussed below under ‘careless speech’.

Next, we wanted to note challenges to and dismissal of democratic and epistemic institutions, including state and international institutions and non-governmental organisations and agencies, universities and research centres, as well as the rule of law, including the separation of powers, protection of minorities, and international refugee and human rights laws. To be clear, challenges to authority and checks on policy-making are a healthy part of a democratic society and indeed one of the core functions of parliament. **What we were concerned with was marking the locations of the erosion of trust in institutions and laws.** If, for example, the EU institutions were misrepresented and their role was manipulated, this could lead to the dismissal of directives or resolutions passed by the EU which protect migrants’ rights (or, as the case may be, the support of policies which infringe on migrants’ rights). The consequences could be deeper still – the manipulation or deformation of the role of democratic institutions can lead to confusion, uncertainty, and instability. Of particular importance in migration debates were those claims that undermined the protection of minorities and human rights, including international refugee law. Therefore, in the undermining of **laws and institutions** we looked for the following:

- I. *Attacks or dismissal of institutions (state, international, non-governmental) in relation to the protection human rights, refugee and migrant rights, protection of minorities, non-discrimination, rights-based order.*
- II. *Attacks or dismissal of policies, laws, regulations in relation to the protection human rights, refugee and migration rights, protection of minorities, non-discrimination, rights-based order.*

3. *The public as the verifier of facts/truth*

This category can be seen as the logical outcome of the dismissal of democratic laws and institutions as well as scientific authority, deeply rooted in populist mechanisms. The public here is coded as ‘the people’ (whoever the people in a given context are), appeals to common sense, of what is ‘obvious’ and therefore needs not be explained or provided with evidence. It may, in certain circumstances, be the (dis)information that is present in the public sphere that is taken at face-value, without scrutiny. It can also be in the form of subjective, on the ground accounts (‘I am from there, so I know’), or based on oversimplified or mythologised assumptions that become impervious to critique (self-evident truths). Some codes that come out of this category are:

- I. *Claims and evidence based on what is ‘obvious’ (claims to truth that ‘everyone knows about’)*
- II. *Claims and evidence based on ‘common sense’ (claims to truth based appeal to gut instincts)*
- III. *Elevated causes or grand narratives as truths (essentialised, oversimplified transcendent notions, historical myths beyond the scrutiny of evidence).*
- IV. *Values, attitudes and ways of being that are perceived as ‘true’ or ‘ours’, and thus beyond the scope of scrutiny.*

4. *Disregard for truth vs the colonisation of truth*

This last category is perhaps the most symbolic of the *quality* of discourse that is being coded in the parliamentary debates, or the lack thereof. On one hand, we are concerned with what has been labelled ‘careless speech’ (Hyvönen, 2018; Newman 2024). It is speech that aims to create confusion, to attract or divert attention, and that uses baseless claims to shock and awe. It can be characterized as an attempt to divert away from truths or facts – a game of smoke and mirrors. with this in mind, we coded for **careless speech** by looking for:

- I. *The proclamation of baseless claims*
- II. *The use of anecdotal evidence to support claims*
- III. *Building arguments around cherry-picking of evidence*
- IV. *The use of exaggerated or hyperbolic statements*
- V. *The use of logical fallacies or circular arguments*

On the flip side of the carelessness that is outlined above, we noted a tendency towards what we have labelled the ‘colonisation of truth’, that is the tendency to *appropriate the truth* by certain actors and groups, leaving little room for contestation, nuance or subjectivity. In fact, the **same tactics noted above were also used here**, such as the use of logical fallacies — not to divert from the truth, but to make it impervious to critique. Another tactic used was to dismiss the opponent as incapable of grasping the truth, most often in the accusation of naiveté, often associated with personal and group-based attacks noted above. A further tactic that emerged from the data is that of totalising arguments or statements, wherein social facts or phenomena could be reduced to one meaning, grand theory or undeniable truth. Finally, statements of control, strength and dominance were coded for their ability to colonise or shut down any argument to the contrary. To summarise, the **colonisation of truth** was coded for in reference to careless speech above, yet with the aim of appropriating the truth instead of diverting it. Additionally, we noted the following tactics:

- I. *Accusations of naivete of opponents* (you are naive, you cannot see the truth)
- II. *Totalising claims* (This is the way we/they are, this is the only way. Ex. Immigration is evil, Europe is Christian, history shows us that...humans are essentially...)
- III. *The use of statements of control, strength and domination to justify claims* (ex. We are strong, we stand in solidarity and we will not let anyone through; we need to take back control).

3.4.2 Operationalising scales of post-truth embeddedness: From tropes to storylines to discourses

The above coding categories allowed us in a first instance to seek out **post-truth tropes** within the debates – that is, to grasp certain characteristics of the ‘post-truth condition’ within discourses themselves. This included coding for the use of intense emotions and personalised attacks, the undermining of science and democratic institutions, the weakening of the infosphere, the abuse of self-evident truths or ‘common sense’, and attempts to colonise the truth on one hand, diminish its role, or completely disregard it on the other. Yet post-truth tropes on their own say little in terms of their impact and relation to broader discourses. In the coding process, we thus also looked at how **storylines** are made. Storylines are, as the name suggests, *stories* which reflect a logically structured amalgamation of arguments (claims, evidence and warrants) within a broader discourse (Hajer 2006:69). A story-line is “a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories in order to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena” (Hajer 2002b:56). Storylines have a very important function in discourse. They can stabilize it by introducing at least some degree of logic; propose a plot, uniting and tying different aspects of a problem; propose evidence and reasons; and position subjects, objects and structures of the story (e.g. heroes, villains, referent objects – “damsels in distress”, or requisites) (see Hajer 2006:69). **In this research, storylines imbued with post-truth tropes can be seen as vehicles for making post-truth more visible, powerful, mainstream, prominent.** This does not mean that storylines imbued with post-truth tropes are filled with all of the characteristics outlined above, nor does this mean that they rely on entirely false information; they can also have truth claims interweaved in them. This is the insidious nature of post-truth in that it is rarely ‘pure’ lies.

In this research, storylines were coded at the level of individual speeches, taking into account claims, evidence and warrants. They were then categorised into ‘threads’ or themes based on commonly shared framings of migration and migrants. As particular storylines become more mainstream and discourse coalitions are constructed, particular storylines may become **dominating discourses** within a particular debate or context (case study and timeframe). What we were particularly interested in was to analyse the *permeability* of certain storylines about migration/migrants to post-truth tropes and, on the other hand, the resilience to post-truth. In order to do so, we established three scales of post-truth *embeddedness*; trivial, popular, and deep.

3.4.2.1 Trivial post-truth embeddedness

The first, **trivial** level is exactly what it means: superficial and unimportant in the scheme of things. Post-truth tropes which have a trivial level of embeddedness are those which may cause disruption or even outrage within political discourses, wherein one political actor (member of parliament) or one political party uses a certain argument (e.g. “Migrants are not human, they are human-like”), yet the **arguments themselves do not find proponents within a larger scope of ‘discourse coalitions’ (structuration) and do not become institutionalised as policy action.** What is important to note here is that a post-truth trope which stays on the trivial level in one context and timeframe may find more resonance (supported by evidence and warrants) in another. Therefore, it is not the post-truth trope itself that can be considered

‘trivial’, but the lack of its institutionalisation — its normalization, sedimentation and broader reproduction within discourse in a given context.

We can thus say, somewhat paradoxically, that the trivial scale appears within contexts wherein dominating discourses are *impervious* to post-truth tropes, ie. their underlying normative assumptions do not allow (or hardly allow) for post-truth tropes to seep into mainstream discourse. We understand this to be in situations wherein the mainstream discourses and their normative underpinnings (warrants within Toulmin’s argument model terminology) are at odds with post-truth tropes that carry with them outrageous, false or misleading claims, careless speech, polarising and politicising messages, to name but a few. The key is in the *incompatibility* of the dominating discourses to the messages communicated by post-truth tropes. **Dominating discourses that produce the conditions for the trivial scale of post-truth embeddedness can therefore be considered *the most robust defences* against post-truth tropes.**

3.4.2.2 Popular post-truth embeddedness

The second scale of post-truth embeddedness refers to the propensity of certain storylines to *adopt* and *promote* post-truth tropes, i.e. those arguments that ‘stick’ within political discourses and get reproduced and shared amongst discourse coalitions. In other words, it is when post-truth tropes become ‘popularised’ within storylines. This is when structuration happens within the framework of argumentative discourse analysis. Popular post-truth tropes seep into storylines and become ‘popularised’ by those who spread them; these post-truth entrepreneurs form discourse coalitions which reproduce certain arguments which may cut across party lines and ideological divisions. We use the notion of ‘popular’ here as a proxy for populist post-truth, which thrives in a space of politicization of sensitive issues like migration, and where ideologically-driven polarization takes shape. As the literature on populist discourses highlights, emotional appeals, particularly using an us-versus-them narrative, finds strong resonance within migration discourses (Higgins 2017; Stanley 2018).

3.4.2.3 Deep post-truth embeddedness

This scale provides the conditions for a fuller or deeper embeddedness of post-truth tropes into storylines, to the point of their institutionalization (or high potential thereof) in policy action and practice. This happens not only when they become normalised within political rhetoric, but when they become the basis or condition for policy action. Post-truth tropes become powerful and sedimented within discourse; their underlying normative assumptions become strong enough that evidence is not necessary, like in securitized contexts. The research grasps this scale in two ways: the first is the sheer intensity and frequency of post-truth tropes within certain storylines that ‘jam’ or ‘flood’ the discourses. The second is the ability of post-truth tropes to colonize the discourses on truth, thus diminishing other (contesting) storylines and informing development of policies and policy actions. In this sense, post-truth becomes to some extent stabilized within discourse. These discourses thrive in conditions of fear, uncertainty and heightened insecurity. This scale holds the potential for a reconstruction of societal understandings of truth (and the evidence thereof) on migration, asylum and borders; it is the *most permeable* to post-truth tropes.

3.5 Analysing the codes

The scales of units of analysis used were the following:

- **Sampling units:** debates chosen (approximately 10 per case study)
- **Recording units:** individual speeches of members of parliament (this differed significantly from case study to case study, from debate to debate).

- **Coding units:** variable length of text within the recording units – from several words (you are a liar!) to larger passages wherein arguments were developed and could be coded for quality of speech, such as totalising claims. Whole recording units could be coded for certain overarching meta-narratives, while claims, evidence and warrants were usually found within an individual speech or across several speeches.

In conjunction with the **first level of analysis** outlined above, we were interested in how and what kinds of storylines were built. This required putting longer 'threads' together, interpreting and getting a sense of the dominant storylines that ran through the debates in each of the case studies. In analysing a timeframe of 10-15 years, we were able to note the following:

- I. The changes in the narratives on migration, migrants and migration policy-making that have occurred over time and across case studies.
- II. The changes in the politicisation and polarisation in migration discourses over time and across case studies.

In adding the **second level of analysis** focusing on post-truth characteristics, we were able to analyse the following:

- I. The changes and prevalence of post-truth characteristics over time and across case studies. Is this a part of regular political rhetoric or can we notice something new?
- II. If/how the quality of discourse has changed over time (the intensity of post-truth characteristics),
- III. Which themes (storylines) do post-truth tropes 'stick to' most (which frames are more conducive to post-truth)
- IV. How embedded post-truth tropes become in storylines (are they contested, are they reaffirmed, do they become a part of regular discourse).
- V. What are the conditions in which post-truth imbued storylines thrive? (polarisation, politicisation, external threats, (far) right-wing dominance in parliament, anti-establishment MPs with power, etc).

3.6 Challenges and limitations

The challenges to analysing post-truth in political discourses are many, and we point to some of our shortcomings above. At the root of the challenges are the defining qualities of post-truth itself, which are difficult to grasp, highly contextual, and dynamically changing. Just like fact-checking, by the time the untruths are caught, they have done their damage and morphed into something different, or disappeared altogether. As we have stated above, our intention was not to uncover untruths and fact-check; it was rather to analyse the quality of parliamentary debates and their resilience or permeability to what we have operationalized as post-truth tropes. The challenge thus was to grasp and code for different facets of post-truth and ascertain their importance within debates. This is a highly contextual and highly interpretive process that does not rely on quantitative thresholds but on deep qualitative analysis. The analysis varied across case studies, wherein each researcher, guided by the shared code book, nevertheless developed their own codes and interpretations. The limitation that comes from this study is therefore that the findings are highly interpretive in nature. Yet the aim was to create a first blueprint for coding post-truth that could be developed further and adapted to different contexts in the future.

A second limitation of the study was the scope itself, which we limited to the analysis of parliamentary debates. We are aware that this is not the space where most post-truth tropes are spawn and spread, and therefore we assumed a risk of not finding what we were looking for, or over-interpreting post-truth tropes in their piecemeal formats. We were further not able to trace the sources of post-truth (ex. from the social media posts of MEPs or party platforms) and *how* they seeped into parliamentary debates. This would have required a thorough media analysis and larger scope of data outside of the parliamentary setting. While we acknowledge this limitation, this was beyond the scope of our inquiry. Further research which follows the development or 'life' of post-truth tropes from their source and into parliamentary debates would be interesting, particularly focusing on who and where post-truth entrepreneurs hijack storylines for political gain.

The next limitation lies in the selection of case studies and sampling of debates themselves. While we aimed at a diversity of case studies to show the complexity and contextuality of post-truth and the dominant discourses on migration in Europe, these case studies cannot claim representativeness or be extrapolated to a larger region or type of parliamentary system. The sampling techniques used to collect the data on debates within each case study also have their limitations. As noted above, we used critical junctures as a guiding principle for the selection of debates within case studies, yet these junctures may not have completely aligned with the debates chosen within parliamentary sittings, and some important discourses may have been missed due to their embeddedness into debates on other topics that were not taken into account by the keyword searches.

Finally, it is important to note that our own positionality and experience as researchers may have been an important limitation in the analysis of the data. We are not free of our inherent biases in what we consider to be truth systems; we are embedded into epistemic communities that are anchored in liberal democratic principles with the protection of minorities – within this an adherence to the rights of migrants – at the core. Further, coming from diverse disciplines and research expertise, we have varying degrees of knowledge and understanding of migration systems within each case study. Yet we tried to mitigate this by assigning researchers who were deeply familiar with the political and social contexts of the chosen case studies, and constantly checking for our own biases and blind spots in our analysis.

4. Policy overview

The main focus of our analysis lies on the narrative side, on how migration and migrants are portrayed, framed, depicted by politicians from different countries over a period of roughly a decade-and-a-half. Beyond mere academic interest, however, the narratives and storylines that are told and retold in houses of parliament about migrants, migration, borders and refugees are of interest also because they have a tendency to influence and shape national and European policy responses. While one would be hard-pressed to find a specific speech or even debate that in and by itself triggered a dramatic shift in migration and border policy on either the national or supra-national level, the cumulative effect of repeated claims that transform into storylines that eventually calcify into hardly questioned normative assumptions about how the world works can also be found in policy proposals and actual policy outcomes.

Conversely, it is also true that nothing comes from nothing as the path dependency of past experiences and policy decisions tends to have a substantial impact on how an issue, in this case migration, is being framed and understood in a given national context. In order to better locate the national and European debates against the background of the core policies in place at a given time, we will here list the critical junctures in migration and border policymaking at the European level. These turning points also functioned as a guiding light in our selection of parliamentary speeches since we sought to focus on speeches in close temporal proximity to said critical junctures.

Given the European Union's broad legislative reach in this area since the landmark Schengen Convention in 1995 and clear limitations on national lawmakers going it alone without consulting EU institutions and complying with existing EU law, the main focus will be on policies at the EU level. However, this is not say that policies or policy decisions unique to individual countries – for example, the 1992 *Große Asylkompromiss* in Germany or Austria's veto to the UN's Global Compact for Migration in 2018 – did and do not constitute an important reference point in contemporary national debates on migration.

4.1 Migration and border policies at EU level

Below is a brief timeline of the development of EU level migration and asylum policy in a long-durée perspective.

Timeframe	Policy framework	Explanation / Significance
1985-1995	Schengen Agreement	1985 Schengen Agreement (between France, West Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxemburg), mainly to ease waiting times at borders, not to liberalise migration. 1995 Schengen Convention signed, then introduced into the Amsterdam Treaty through the Schengen Acquis. Cornerstone of freedom of movement within the EU, which entailed a strengthening of external EU borders and a common visa policy.
1999-2004	Dublin Convention & Tampere Programme – First phase of Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (CEAS-like instruments), including Frontex	Dublin Convention (written in 1990, in force 1997) presupposed similar treatment of asylum seekers across MS, established rules of first country of asylum. Amsterdam Treaty (1999): Article 63 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community (TEC) provided (inter alia) that the Council was to adopt within five years a specific set of measures on asylum, refugees and displaced persons (Article 63(1) and (2)). Of particular importance, such measures were to be in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and 'other relevant treaties'. Tampere Council Conclusions (1999): first reference to the idea of a 'Common European Asylum System' & need for one. Summit in Seville (2002): efforts to create joint immigration and asylum policy for the EU (CEAS). Work on border management and returns. Treaty of Nice (2001): co-decision on border control, asylum and immigration. More resources for border enforcement at outside borders of EU. CEAS-like instruments: Temporary Protection Directive (2001) Dublin II Regulation (2003) Reception Conditions Directive (2003) Qualifications Directive (2003)
2004	Accession of 10 new EU Member States; Directive 2004/38/EC; Frontex	Directive 2004/38/EC: Directive on the Right of Union citizens and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (to codify and standardize all other directives)

		Frontex: establishment of common border policy agency (2004 Directive) and Europe-wide anti-smuggling task-forces (Europol agency). Hague Programme (2004): called for second phase of CEAS instruments to be implemented by 2010. Result: more resources for border enforcement at outside borders of EU.
2007-2014	European Pact on Immigration and Asylum; Initiation of second phase of CEAS; Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, Arab Spring	2007: Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) – in force 2009; Article 78 makes first explicit reference to CEAS. Objective: ‘establish a common area of protection and solidarity based on a common asylum procedure and a uniform status for those granted international protection’ on the basis of ‘high protection standards’. 2008: A Common Immigration Policy for the EU based on ‘solidarity’, ‘security’ and ‘prosperity’ = European Pact on Immigration and Asylum (Issued by French Presidency). Encourages: integration; deportation of irregular migrants; effective border controls; policy on asylum. 2009-2014: Stockholm Programme: roadmap for developing the EU’s migration policy (encouraging mobility; ensuring coherent policy making; promoting legal migration whilst preventing irregular migration). 2010: Establishment of EASO – European Asylum Support Office. Second phase of CEAS: Eurodac Regulation (recast) (2013) Dublin II Regulation (recast) (2013) Reception Conditions Directive (recast) (2013) Qualifications Directive (recast) (2012) Asylum Procedures Directive (recast) (2013) 2011: “The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility” (GAMM) (Commission Communication on strengthening the Global Approach, first mentioned in 2005) – focus on external migration policy - partnerships with third countries to ‘facilitate the organisation of legal migration’; prevention of irregular migration. Key point in the externalisation of EU asylum policy. Regular migration – Blue Card Directive (2011), Single Permit Directive (2011), Seasonal Workers Directive (2014)
2015-2020	European ‘refugee crisis’, European Agenda on Migration & Security, towards reform	4 pillars of Agenda: • Fight against irregular migration • Security external borders • Strong common asylum policy • European policy on legal migration 5 areas of reform: • Search and rescue missions • Military intervention against smugglers • EU quotas – resettlement and relocation • Safe countries list • Readmission and returns Immediate responses to the refugee crisis: • Relocation scheme / resettlement scheme (2015) • Hotspot approach – swift identification, fingerprinting (adopted in Italy)

		Valetta Summit (2015): EU Summit with African leaders – further shift towards the externalisation of EU asylum policy. “Towards a reform of the Common European Asylum System and enhancing legal avenues to Europe” (COMS 2016) – Dublin ‘Recast’: • shorten time limits for sending requests, carrying out transfers between MS) • ensure fair sharing of responsibilities between MS by complementing current system with a corrective allocation mechanism in case of disproportionate burden on one MS. • discourage abuses and secondary movements of applications within the EU (asylum shopping)
2020-2024	New Pact on Migration and Asylum, EU-Belarusian border situation, Temporary Protection Directive	Proposal for a New Pact on Migration and Asylum (2020) 2021-...: EU-Belarusian border situation – ‘instrumentalisation’ Crisis Regulation in New Pact on Migration and Asylum. 2022: Triggering of Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC) in response to the Russo-Ukraine War. 2024: EP and Council adopt the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Two years for implementation.

5. Findings: Post-truth tropes and dominating discourses

5.1 Introduction

Through the findings of the empirical analysis of 60 parliamentary debates across 6 European case studies, we aim to show how post-truth tropes become embedded or not into parliamentary debates; how they spread and become institutionalized in political discourses and ultimately policy frameworks. The findings are presented into three analytical categories noted in the methodology section: (1) trivial, (2) popular and (3) deep post-truth embeddedness. These scales are *not* measurements or thresholds of the level of post-truth within particular migration discourses; rather, they are interpretive ‘spaces’ in which we have -found post-truth tropes which are (1) mainly resisted (trivial) (2) permeate and become normalized in mainstream discourses (popular) and (3) come to dominate / colonise discourses and become institutionalized into policy structures (deep). Each scale is firstly outlined and explained, followed by a selection of examples from the case studies. Not every case study is represented in every scale: the summary of findings below relies on examples from chosen cases to provide narrative consistency and highlight different features of post-truth tropes. Each scale concludes with a short explanatory summary.

5.2 Trivial Post-Truth Scale: The space of de-politicised migration discourses

5.2.1 Introduction

At this scale of analysis, the interest was to ascertain what kinds of discourses on migration provide the best defenses against post-truth tropes. Why do post-truth tropes remain trivial, i.e. why do they *not* become embedded into dominating discourses and institutionalized? On a basic level, we observe it in contexts where post-truth tropes do not find ripe breeding ground for their narratives to spread. In our research, this required a low level of politicization of the migration ‘issue’, as well as a low level of polarization in the public or political sphere. Politicization may be defined by the strategic discursive

construction of events or issues for political advantage (see for example Krzyżanowska & Krzyżanowski 2018). At the time of writing this report, in the year 2025, migration, asylum and the protection of borders are amongst the most politicised policy areas across all case studies, yet this was not the case in 2011, for example, the starting year of coding in some case studies. In Poland in 2011, inwards migration was practically a non-issue, therefore there was little incentive for ‘post-truth entrepreneurs’ to become active in this space.

Polarisation is intimately tied to politicisation; divisions happen in a discursive space that is politically charged. Polarisation may be defined here simply as the ‘growing differences in attitudes between groups’ (Schmidt-Catran & Czymara 2022). As we will see in the ‘popular’ post-truth scale, increasingly acrimonious, identity-based discourses that come with polarization provide ripe breeding ground for post-truth storylines to spread. Therefore, the first indicators of **trivial post-truth embeddedness scale are the relatively low levels of politicisation and polarisation of migration issues** in a certain context.

While the trivial post-truth scale of embeddedness can be explained by the absence or low level of politicisation or polarization, **it can also be understood through the relative stability and institutional coherence of the discursive field itself**. This was particularly relevant in settings where dominant discourses around migration were grounded in legalistic, EU-coordinated, or technocratic frameworks. The underlying warrants or normative underpinnings in these cases were embedded in liberal democratic frameworks wherein the rule of law and rights-based policies were the norm. In such cases, post-truth tropes — though not necessarily absent — were more likely to be absorbed, neutralised, or marginalised before they gained discursive traction.

What emerges is a form of **discursive resilience** upholding democratic liberal principles, whereby the rhetorical space available for outrageous, polarizing, or emotionally charged interventions is constrained by the internal logic of the mainstream storyline. Rather than the absence of post-truth as such, it is the structural *incompatibility* between dominant discourses and post-truth tropes that prevents escalation. We thus understand resilience here as the ability for dominant discourses to ‘bounce back’ and maintain their integrity in the face of post-truth interference. This can also be seen through the resilience of the normative underpinnings of discourses, i.e. the warrants. This underlines the importance of not only analysing the presence of post-truth tropes, but the narrative architectures within which they attempt —and fail — to embed themselves.

There are two major discourses on migration that have emerged within our case studies that constitute at particular points in time and in particular contexts relatively stable and coherent discursive fields that have resisted post-truth. These discourses emerged within parliamentary debates in the form of: **(1) the striving for controlled and orderly migration governance**, wherein the political discourse remained at the level of policies and technocratic solutions, emphasizing the importance of technocratic and largely de-politicised migration management. The second discourse emerged in contexts of general consensus that **(2) (forced) migration is (also) a humanitarian issue**, and the need to provide support and protection for those fleeing conflict and persecution is not only embedded into constitutions, but also values and historical legacies springing from negative points of reference such as the Holocaust (for a critical discussion of this legacy see Kundani 2023). This discourse was strong across case studies at a period in time in the early 2000s when the rhetoric of ‘normative power Europe’ (Whitman 2011) was at its height, including the promotion of democracy-building, including human rights norms in the European neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, post-truth tropes were also present within parliamentary debates that exhibited overall low levels of politicisation and polarisation on the issue of migration, wherein an underlying consensus on

liberal democratic principles of rule of law and human rights-based order was the norm. As we will see in the Spanish case below, post-truth tropes appeared also *in conjunction with* humanitarian discourses, propagated by far-left political members of parliament. In other cases, they often emerged from the fringes of the political spectrum and appeared either as totalising claims within the category of the colonisation of truth (replacement theories, metaphors of invasion, impending catastrophe), or as baseless claims that appeal to everyday experiences of annoyance or irritability (migrants as freeloaders, as ungrateful, as untruthful or not 'real' refugees).

5.2.2 Examples from the field

5.2.2.1 European Parliament (EP)

In 2011, the year when (forced) migrants were noted in greater numbers on Lampedusa and in Malta following the outbreak of the Arab Spring, there was large-scale consensus at the European Parliament level on the need to provide humanitarian support; a duty of care towards those on the move as well as to nascent democracies in Northern Africa was a strong underlying warrant. The EP at that time was far less polarized internally on this issue. In this context, post-truth tropes that instilled fear and exaggerated claims that illegal migrants would invade and break Europe apart were generally shut down or ignored.

However, this does not mean that they did not surface in parliamentary debates. We noted singular instances of Non-Aligned (NI) MEPs who made hyperbolic claims of forced migrants as freeloaders: "they just want to go somewhere in the EU – to the land that, **in their mind, is flowing with milk and honey** – in order to try their luck here and usually only in order to be included in our social systems" (04.04.2011_19_Andreas Mölzer_NI). In a more foreboding tone, an MEP from the far-right European Freedom and Democracy (EFD) warned: "when the migration takes on the dimension – **I repeat – of an invasion**, we need to face up to the issue". (04.04.2011_18_Mario Borghezio_EP_EFD). These exaggerated, threatening statements oscillate between careless speech and the colonisation of truth.

Within the same debate on 04.04.2011, an MEP from the Netherlands (also non-aligned), developed his argument to include cherry-picked evidence of ungrateful migrants who deliberately choose illegality in order to abuse European generosity. He claimed that "Thousands of prospectless immigrants from [...] are abusing the instability in their region in order to seek a better life in rich Europe." He provided decontextualized evidence of immigrants who were interviewed on TV, framing them as sly and ungrateful freeloaders who "complained about the lack of cigarettes and drink provided by the Italian authorities. You would almost forget that **people consciously choose illegality and deliberately misuse social services in Europe**" (04.04.2011_26_Daniël van der Stoep_EP_NI). This last statement has no anchoring in evidence; it constitutes a generalisation of certain opinions to a whole community and selling them as common knowledge (we almost forgot, but this is an obvious truth).

What is telling is that this intervention, and the response to it, was backed up by a warrant that made clear the dominant consensus at the time, namely that humanitarianism is the underlying normative value to uphold. An MEP from the Socialist and Democrats (S&D) made the point clearly: „I would like to ask my fellow MEP who spoke just now if it can really be considered appropriate to apply the terms 'freeloaders' and 'fortune seekers' to people who are fleeing from a situation of great political distress – **and all the political groups agree on this** – such as the one in North Africa" (04.04.2011_27_Silvia Costa_EP_S&D). To this, van der Stoep backtracked and replied, "We in the European Union are now having to deal with a huge influx of refugees and the majority on the left are saying that these are just unfortunate people, all of whom are fleeing their countries. **Fine, but why do they all have to come to Europe?**" (04.04.2011_26_Daniël van der Stoep_EP_NI).

The acknowledgement that those fleeing conflict should be provided with protection (although perhaps not all of them on our turf) underscores the humanitarian framing of forced migrants at the time, a stark contrast to the securitized framework that dominated from 2016 onwards. The majority of the European Parliament at that time, dominated by S&D, PPE, ALDE/Verts, and GUE/NGL, were in bipartisan agreement on the need for migrants' human rights to be respected, and that Europe needs to act in solidarity and live up to its humanitarian ideals. The debate in question ended with an overwhelming motion to trigger the Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC), which ultimately was not activated in 2011 because of a lack of a qualified majority in the Council. In short, exaggerated claims of migrant invasions and freeloading simply did not stick.

5.2.2.2 Italy

Despite sustained migratory pressure and intense media attention, the Italian parliamentary discourse between 2011 and 2013 exhibited a remarkable degree of discursive resilience against post-truth escalation. In this period, the dominant narratives were anchored in humanitarian rationales and oriented towards the need for European solidarity, legal norms, and institutional responses. While Italy's geographical location placed it at the forefront of Mediterranean arrivals – particularly after the Arab Spring – the mainstream political field did not yet exhibit the high levels of polarisation or antagonistic fragmentation that would characterize later years. The events surrounding the Lampedusa shipwrecks catalysed parliamentary interventions that, rather than exploit polarised emotional outrage, sought¹ to embed the moral appeal in a shared European conscience: “That is why the anger, the indignation, and the sense of powerlessness compel us to join in Pope Francis’s cry, in that ‘shame’ which I believe is a collective sentiment.” (04.10.2013_2_Angelino Alfano_IT_PdL). Alfano’s comments also reflect a core warrant within Italy’s dominant discursive framework: the recognition of shared European and humanitarian obligations, and the inadequacy of EU mechanisms such as the Dublin Regulation to address collective challenges. This bureaucratic critique, “a wholly bureaucratic and bureaucratizing approach”, did not seek to undermine legal norms, but rather to improve institutional design, reinforcing the legalistic character of mainstream discourse. Even calls for more “integrated strategies” in response to trafficking framed the crisis as one of governance, not existential threat.

However, voices such as Fabio Rampelli of the Brothers of Italy exemplify a post-truth discursive style that was increasingly prominent within right-wing parliamentary interventions during this period. While not hegemonic, these framings were visible and influential, particularly in the articulation of migration as an existential threat or moral crisis. Rampelli’s intervention was rich in rhetorical hyperbole and suggested an existential threat through phrases like “history is closing in on us”, while simultaneously deploying a dualism between “cowardly racists” and “millions of generous Italians” to claim moral high ground. He further questioned the humanitarian rationale itself by asserting: “I find nothing humanitarian, Minister, in handing migrants over to organized crime,” a hyperbolic construction that substitutes systemic complexity with moral outrage (04.10.2013_20_Fabio Rampelli_IT_FdI). Isabella Bertolini (People of Freedom) had already, in 2011, employed securitising rhetoric to frame migration as a threat requiring exceptional measures. Her intervention displayed several features of post-truth tropes: reliance on anecdotal evidence,

¹ Pope Francis expressed his grief for the victims of the Lampedusa shipwreck during an audience at the Vatican on 3 October 2013, marking the 50th anniversary of the encyclical *Pacem in terris*. Speaking off the cuff, he stated: “While speaking of peace, and of the inhuman global economic crisis as a sign of grave disrespect for human beings, I cannot but recall with great sorrow the countless victims of the shipwreck off Lampedusa. It is a disgrace, it is a disgrace!”. He concluded with an impassioned appeal: “Let us join our forces so that such tragedies may never happen again. Only through determined cooperation from all can such tragedies be prevented” (as reported by the SIR news agency).

emotive amplification, and the proposal to “adapt our laws and not wait for the judiciary”—a rhetorical move that implicitly challenged judicial safeguards and institutional process (07.04.2011_8_Isabella Bertolini_IT_PdL). Even when she described the arrivals as an “invasion” for Italy “which requires extraordinary initiatives,” her rhetoric was tempered by calls for procedural normalcy, like expanding identification centers and implementing repatriation via simplified legal means.

These proposals remained within the logic of legal-administrative governance, while also echoing civilizational and securitarian assumptions that were gaining ground within the mainstream right. While such alarmist framings were relatively constrained within parliamentary debate between 2011 and 2013, they marked the emergence of a discursive undercurrent that would gain traction in subsequent years. These tropes, grounded in emotional and moral binaries – such as “false compassion” versus “serious policies” – would later contribute to a policy shift from rescue-oriented operations (*Mare Nostrum*) to security approaches (*Triton*), and to the proliferation of bilateral deportation agreements. In the period under analysis, however, strong institutional logics and legalistic warrants continued to structure the parliamentary arena, preventing the permeation of post-truth dynamics into mainstream discourses. The triviality of post-truth in this case lies not in the absence of post-truth tropes, but in the contested space they occupied: visible, at times influential, but ultimately not hegemonic within the dominant discourse coalitions of the time.

5.2.2.3 Germany

In Germany, the storyline that migration is first and foremost a humanitarian issue held steady throughout the period of investigation and showed strong resilience in spite of a growing chorus of detractors that used their time in parliament to sow divisions within the humanitarian consensus. The centrality of the humanitarian framing especially in the earlier debates comes out in the Greens Renate Künast’s intervention in 2012 when she took a Constitutional Court decision that asylum seekers enjoyed the same rights as German citizens as the basis of overall migration policy: “I believe that the principle of the non-relativisability of human dignity must also apply to many other refugee law issues.” (29.11.2012_DE_Renate Künast_B90/GRÜ). The persistence of the humanitarian angle in framing migration shows up even in a debate whose main focus is on facilitating deportation. Thus, in 2024, Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser (SPD), prefaced her policy proposals with an appeal to the humanitarian core of Germany’s approach: “Germany is a country of solidarity. Anyone fleeing war and terror can count on our protection and support. And we offer refugees far more than just protection: we help them to arrive in Germany.” (18.01.2024_DE_Nancy Faeser_SPD).

Even speakers who proposed a securitized approach to migration policy in the large majority of cases did not question the humanitarian premise that people in need deserve help and asylum in Germany. A typical example is from the CDU’s Detlef Seif who in calling for a stricter border control regime argued: “The fact is that many people currently abuse our European asylum system. Of the average 600,000 applicants per year across the EU in recent years, around 400,000 are not entitled to protection. These are facts and figures from Eurostat; they are all documented. We are talking about more than 1 million people in the last three years. That cannot be, and it must not be. **Please note: as a result, we are taking capacities away from precisely those people who need it, namely those who are actually being persecuted and who deserve our protection.**” (17.12.2020_DE_Detlef Seif_CDU)

This narrative of deserving refugees also extends to members of the extreme right such as the AFD’s Christian Wirth. As noted in the debate, while the overall gist of his intervention is to call for swift deportations based on vague and unspecified claims about their huge costs to the German taxpayer, he also argues that this takes away funds from actual refugees deserving of support. “Because every cent -

we are talking about billions of euros since 2015 - that is paid for illegal migrants constitutes the offence of misappropriation of taxpayers' money; section 266 of the Criminal Code. In addition, the obligation to leave the country puts a strain on resources that we urgently need for real refugees.” (17.12.2020_DE_Christian Wirth_AFD). In the binary of what is a ‘true’ and ‘false’ refugee, the former is essentialised, evoking a stereotypical, simplified image of the perfect victim without allowing for nuance or understanding of the many faces forced migrants may have.

5.2.2.4 Poland

Poland is relatively new to migration debates, particularly concerning more complex forms of migration governance and refugee protection. As previously mentioned, immigration was placed on the political agenda alongside the escalation of the so-called “migration crisis” in 2015 and the negotiations surrounding the relocation mechanism within the EU. Although Poland was not directly affected by the influx of migrants in 2015, it began to discuss the potential consequences of relocating asylum seekers from other EU member states. During this period, political debates prominently featured security language, especially from the right side of the political spectrum, which employed well-known securitizing tropes such as references to terrorism, the criminalization of immigrants, selective presentation of facts, “common knowledge,” and examples from other countries with allegedly failed and catastrophic immigration policies. As one of the more prominent Members of Parliament from the Law and Justice Party indicated in a debate in 2015: “It is our duty to ensure the safety of Polish citizens; it is our duty to prevent the kinds of situations that are now taking place in Germany and in Sweden. We have all witnessed the number of rapes and crimes that have occurred. But this is only one aspect of immigration policy” (9.03.2016_PL_Dominik Tarczyński_Law and Justice).

Even though these types of claims were repeated throughout the parliamentary debates between 2015 and 2016, they were countered with calls for a humanitarian, calm, and rational approach to immigration — one that is driven more by solidarity and a technocratic, managerial perspective rather than by panic politics. “We need to address the challenges ahead of us rationally. We need to act properly and voluntarily in this matter. But ‘voluntarily’ means showing goodwill — not fuelling the sentiments that are spreading so widely, particularly on the Internet. It’s always easier to attack anonymously, to write nonsense, to tell horror stories about what will happen to Europe and to Christian civilization if we let a few Muslims into Poland and help them in such a difficult situation, when they are fleeing for their lives” (16.09.2015_PL_Rafał Grupański_Civic Platform).

The liberal democratic and humanitarian underpinnings of the 2015 and 2016 Polish debates on migration appeared to stabilize the discourse and resisted post-truth tropes by acknowledging the need for solutions that stem from obligations toward incoming migrants rather than outright rejecting humanitarianism. Even entrepreneurs of post-truth, who steadily introduced fear-driven discourses and a departure from evidence-based policymaking, seemed to recognize that there are international obligations and a need for some form of humanitarianism, albeit not within the EU relocation scheme. “Because of course, it’s not that we don’t want to help people in need. It’s not that we are outside of European solidarity (...). Poland is not breaking away from solidarity, but we should provide help where it is truly needed, not through imposed allocation quotas from the European Union. Our duty is to ensure security” (9.03.2016_PL_Dominik Tarczyński_Law and Justice Party). This has visibly changed since 2021 along with the rapid militarization of migration management in Poland triggered by the so called „Polish-Belarusian border crisis”, which will be discussed in the deep post-truth scale section.

5.2.2.5 Spain

In Spanish parliamentary debates the humanitarian discourse has become especially prominent in the debates revolving around the issue of regularization of foreigners. Particularly referential was the plenary debate that took place on 9th of April 2024 about a bill proposal (*Proposición de Ley para una regularización extraordinaria para personas extranjeras en España*), which was submitted as a popular legislative initiative (*Iniciativa Legislativa Popular*) on 17th of August 2023. Opening this debate, Rego Candamil, speaking on behalf of the Galician Nationalist Bloc (*Bloque Nacionalista Galego*, BNG) in favour of the proposal, explicitly acknowledged the necessity for humanitarianism:

“From a humanist perspective, which is inherent to the leftist position and, therefore, to the Galician sovereignist left represented by BNG, **no person is illegal**; that is, no human being should be condemned to be outside the recognition of fundamental human and democratic rights or excluded from public policies aimed at making these rights effective. [...] The situation of irregularity affecting nearly 500,000 people in the Spanish State fosters the violation of these essential rights and leads to situations of labour exploitation or exclusion from basic public services such as education and health. It prevents, in any case, the affected individuals from pursuing a dignified life, which is unjust. [...] Ultimately, **we must reject colonial, neocolonial, and imperialist plundering policies** that prevent many countries from developing, based on their resources and through fair economic and commercial exchanges, so they can guarantee a dignified life for all their inhabitants. Moreover, besides the fact that the Spanish State, as a member of the European Union, follows these self-interested policies of the so-called West, led by the United States, it is fully co-responsible for this” (9.04.2024_ES_Rego Candamil_BNG).

In this debate, the humanitarian discourse is unequivocally dominant. Arguments supporting the need for regularization — as expressed by different speakers — derive from fundamental human rights and the idea of democracy. Such a humanitarian perspective at the discursive level is reflected by the rechanneling of the focus of the debate from the question of legality towards the issue of regulation of migration. The logic of the argument assumes that the problem of migration is first and foremost a problem of its regularization, namely that it is an issue of legal/administrative arrangements regarding the possibility of obtaining legal residence and work permit. According to this argumentation, migration should not be understood as a question of legality or lack thereof, because it is a matter of human rights. To put it differently: recognizing a migrant as illegal would — according to this logic — mean depriving him or her of basic rights.

This debate is of interest for this study for three reasons.

First, the humanitarian narrative in this debate is cross-party, i.e. none of the parties taking part in it, representing very different groups and political orientations, questions its validity. The only exception is the representative of VOX party, the right-wing populist party, which has built its political identity on the anti-immigration narrative. Yet while opposing regularization, they still refrain from using the label of “illegal immigrant” in this debate, even though VOX party members on different occasions, and even in the debates taking place later the same day, would do so. Departing from the discussion of legality, Rocío de Meer Méndez focuses instead on the victims (implicitly victims of migration policies) “But let's talk about victims. Today I want to talk to you about victims, about easy victims and difficult victims” (9.04.2024_ES_de Meer Méndez_VOX).

Secondly, the post-truth tropes appear *within* the humanitarian storyline itself, unlike the examples above. Yet they appear alongside the underlying humanitarian discourse without dominating it. They are used as a supplementary argument intended to make a (greater) impression and appeal to emotions. This includes the use of totalizing claims and elevated causes, as well as ad homonym attacks. What is quite significant

about the humanitarian storyline is that the post-truth tropes are evoked mostly by the politicians representing left-wing parties. Three quotes can serve as good examples:

- 1) Javier Sánchez Serna – representative of Podemos (Murcia): “Today’s vote, ladies and gentlemen, is about democracy. And it is fundamentally about democracy for two main reasons. The first is that nearly half a million fellow citizens live and work in Spain, they are our neighbors, and yet they have fewer rights than anyone else. **Their great sin is committing an administrative infraction: not having a residence permit. An infraction—like running a red light—but many of them are called illegal, including by some of your lordships.** It’s curious (...) that a worker who breaks his back working to support his family is called illegal, but **someone who fails to pay five million euros to the Treasury** and then, following a tip-off, regularizes his or her debt with the Treasury, is called Your Majesty and has no problem traveling around the country (...)” (9.04.2024_ES_Sanchez Serna_Podemos). The post-truth character of this argumentation consists in the far-reaching trivialization of the problem: the lack of legal residence and work permit is here reduced to the same level as a common traffic violation. At the same time such an administrative (and not serious, as already established) infringement is juxtaposed with (a serious, because amounting to five million euros) fiscal offense. What resonates in this argument is the class conflict that lies in the background: hard-working employees are exploited and deprived of rights (warrant), and it is paired with a strongly populist narrative based on a binary opposition between the oppressed ‘good people’ and the privileged ‘cunning elites’.
- 2) Jordi Salvador i Duch – speaking on behalf of d’Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya: “Keeping people in this irregular situation exposes them to labor exploitation and the violation of fundamental rights. Trafficking for labor exploitation, and also for sexual exploitation or gender violence, is much easier to carry out with these people than with any other. **We are allowing a modern form of slavery** that affects thousands of people in our countries. **One day, history books will study that, just as we study slavery in other centuries, this was allowed here. The invisibility of this problem allows for abuse, exploitation, and in some cases even the death of these people. In some cases, even death, I say.** Some people aren’t too interested, right? Some might find it exaggerated. **Those in the stands today and the thousands following us from many places know that I’m not exaggerating one bit;** they know that today is a historic day in their lives.” (9.04.2024_ES_Salvador i Duch_ERC) In this short passage, two types of post-truth tropes in the argument in favor of the new bill come to the forefront: (1) the exaltation and exaggeration of the totalizing claim (situation of irregularity in Spain equals slavery), which is proven by the fact that everyone knows that (evidence based on what is obvious).
- 3) Elisa Garrido Jiménez – from PSOE, taking the floor just after the representative of VOX finished her speech: “Yes, immigration is truly a danger; we just saw it right now in the performance Ms. De Meer just gave here at this podium. The danger is that hateful, harmful speech that only seeks to pit people against each other. It’s striking that this is being said by a woman named De Meer, who has a colleague named Smith next to her, and a colleague named Tertsch in Europe [European Parliament]. I don’t know what the contemporaries of your ancestors thought when they came to Spain. I don’t know, but it seems that you are precisely advocating for your ancestors not to be here. It seems that everything that comes from abroad bothers you, except for one thing: the money that comes from Iran; that’s a great help, really” (9.04.2024_ES_Garrido Jiménez_PSOE). In totality this passage is in fact an ad homonym attack – the arguments of Rocío de Meer (VOX) are being undermined, not by appealing to factual arguments, but on the grounds on who she is and who the people around her are.

Thirdly, this debate in particular, and Spanish case as in general, is unique as – contrary to many other countries – the humanitarian storyline is not only one of the dominant discourses in Spanish debates on migration but is actually the only one to be institutionalized, sometimes with the use of post-truth tropes.

5.2.3 Conclusion

The trivial post-truth scale of embeddedness captures contexts in which post-truth tropes enter the discursive field but ultimately fail to gain traction. Exaggeration, outrage, moral binaries, and falsehoods were present in parliamentary debates across the case studies, yet these remained largely peripheral. Their triviality stems not from invisibility, but from their inability to reshape the normative and institutional logics of mainstream discourses.

Our analysis suggests that this dynamic arises under three interlinked conditions. Firstly, low levels of politicization and polarization reduce the rhetorical incentive to mobilise post-truth framings. Secondly, a technocratic or humanitarian consensus, grounded in depoliticised, legal-administrative governance acts as a discursive filter, limiting the uptake of affective or populist distortions. Thirdly, normative underpinnings (i.e. warrants) that underpin post-truth tropes are at odds with the dominating discourses in a particular context and their underlying normative structures, especially where legality, EU cooperation, and rights-based values prevail.

This pattern was evident across several contexts. In Italy and in the European Parliament, alarmist metaphors such as “invasion” were voiced but met with rebuttal or indifference. In Italy, these framings lacked broader uptake and were actively resisted by dominant coalitions. In the European Parliament, fringe actors introduced post-truth tropes, but the prevailing humanitarian consensus remained intact. As demonstrated across the case studies above – Germany, Spain, and early-period Poland included – post-truth tropes did surface, but they failed to reshape policy discourse or destabilize legal-humanitarian warrants. In Spain in particular, the humanitarian discourse was not only dominant but uniquely institutionalized, making it an interesting anomaly in this regard. While such discourse prevailed across party lines, post-truth tropes paradoxically served to propel and reinforce it by triggering reaffirmations of rights-based norms and collective resilience to securitarian framings.

Still, this resilience is not fixed or impermeable; it remains contingent on broader political dynamics and can be gradually weakened when exposed to sustained polarisation, escalating securitisation, or strategic deployment of post-truth rhetoric by influential actors. Developments such as the shift in Italy after 2015 or Poland after 2021 demonstrate how such conditions can erode dominant discursive frameworks, particularly those grounded in legal norms, technocratic consensus, and humanitarian warrants.

Triviality, then, should be understood not as the absence of post-truth, but as a contingent outcome of discursive coherence, normative anchoring, and resilience to post-truth tropes. The trivial post-truth scale of embeddedness therefore functions both as a diagnostic of institutional robustness and as a warning: the containment of post-truth is always contingent on the stability of the discursive field in which it emerges.

5.3. Popular post-truth scale of embeddedness: Solidarity as a battlefield of post-truth politics

5.3.1 Introduction

What we label here as **popular post-truth** are those storylines that become normalised and structured within public discourse and emerge as dominant frameworks for interpreting political reality. There are three features that make them stand out and differentiate them from ‘trivial post-truth’.

Firstly, these storylines gain traction through repetition, emotional resonance, and their capacity to circulate widely within discursive coalitions (Higgins, 2017; Stanley, 2018). Secondly, they tend to “stick” in political

discourse, i.e. regardless of their factual accuracy, they shape both institutional agendas and public attitudes, often reinforcing simplified storylines and polarized imaginaries. Thirdly, they tend to arise in the context of highly politicized issues that mobilize public opinion. Thus, popular post-truth tropes in arguments forged in public debates would often be used (and repeated) on the 'hot' issues that clearly divide public opinion and become an element of partisan antagonism. Therefore, in contrast to trivial post-truth, popular post-truth embeddedness appears in the contexts of high(er) level of politicization and is typically related to high(er) polarization. In debates concerning migration, post-truth tropes become especially prominent in times of crisis, i.e. when migration becomes an issue of public interest. The arguments raised by politicians therefore have more potential to resonate with the public.

Popular post-truth embeddedness often appears in the context of power-dynamics, when migration becomes a symbolic battleground where two levels of politicization collide: 1) the national and 2) the European. In the first case, member states, particularly those located at the external borders of the EU, foreground national interests and domestic political pressures, often demanding greater engagement from other countries in sharing the burden of irregularized and forced migrant reception. The arguments raised in this context follow the pattern of "blame game", in which member states accuse each other of shirking responsibility and of exploiting others' vulnerabilities. In the second case, the problem lies in the EU's detachment from practical challenges of "handling" migration, while at the same time pushing for political solutions that are "costly" for the member states. In this argument the EU is portrayed as a hegemon that imposes political solutions on unwilling member states. A good example illustrating this case is the EU-led relocation schemes, which are often portrayed as top-down impositions that undermine national sovereignty and democratic legitimacy.

Within our research, popular post-truth tropes appeared most notably within the **solidarity** storyline. While the general solidarity narrative follows the logic of solidarity as a foundational value of integration and a necessary response to shared challenges, post-truth tropes were typically saturated with critical, sometimes acrimonious arguments, namely that solidarity mechanisms as promoted by the EU institutions become in fact the instruments of hegemonic centralization, the symbol of elite detachment and technocratic overreach. Such a narrative has especially become prominent in the national debates in Italy, Germany, Poland, as well as in the European Parliament, as the examples below illustrate.

5.3.2 Examples from the field

5.3.2.1 European Parliament

In 2011, arguments in the European Parliament against itself (Europe) were often of the self-deprecating category: "If we Europeans want to be major players in the world, then we have to change our approach and work towards creating a solidarity-based Union for the Mediterranean..." (04.04.2011_EP_Malika Benarab_Attou_Greens). In 2016, amidst what was called the European refugee crisis, however, we witnessed a transformation in the warrants underpinning mainstream discourses in the EP. This was deemed a "realistic turn", towards a 'holistic approach to migration', as some MEPs termed it, or a turn away from the EU's role as a global soft power supporting human rights and social protection. In this transformation of the role of the EU, it was difficult to find 'we European' arguments in the European Parliament. Rather, a divided house took it in turns to attack the EU, particularly the European Commission, from both the right and the left. The underlying warrant from both sides of the political spectrum was that the EU is either a hegemonic actor in its ability to hold back migrants or, conversely, to hold them hostage to human rights abuses. As an MEP from Europe of Nations and Freedom, the precursor to the Identity and Democracy Group put it: "Instead of fighting against the migratory submersion, the Union is therefore organising it. This is further proof that it is a technocratic oligarchy that does not care about the European peoples, their identities and their aspirations" (04.12.2016_EP_Gilles Lebreton_ENF).

The Left similarly did not leave room for interpretation of the role of the EU: “The European Union has ended up maintaining hot spots as concentration camps and itself violating the human rights of refugees” (04.12.2016_EP_Νεοκλής Σουλκιώτης_GUE/NGL). The first statement uses circular reasoning to prove one’s statement: the EU is organising the migratory submersion of Europe because it is a technocratic oligarchy; it is a technocratic oligarchy because it is organising the migratory submersion. This logical fallacy was unimportant to the debate, however. The consensus that the EU became the embodiment for all that is wrong with migration to Europe allowed for the claims against it to become totalizing – it is the epitome of evil as a technocratic or human hell, there is no need for logical evidence.

In a 2019 debate on migration following the Sea-Watch 3 and Sea-Eye NGO humanitarian rescue boat fiasco which left 49 people stranded on board without access to Italian ports, emotions surged in what had become a divided European parliament. Some of the now structured storyline blaming the EU for enticing migrants was present: “the EU policy has turned commercial shipping and coastguards in the Mediterranean into a taxi service for criminal gangs dealing in human beings” (15.01.2019_EP_Steven Woolfe_EFDD). Or, on the other hand, the EU’s responsibility for the many deaths at the external borders: “first they decided to seal the borders tight so that no migrant could set foot in Europe. Then they [the EU] decided that the best deterrent strategy was to let them die in the Mediterranean” (15.02.2019_EP_Marina AlbiolGuzmán_GUE/NGL). The Other that came into the debate were the NGOs who were also to blame: “Human smuggling has become one of the most flourishing business models, and European NGOs are also assisting in this when they transport migrants over hundreds of kilometers to Europe” (15.01.2019_EP_Kinga Gál_PPE).

When the underlying warrants within the European Parliament turned decisively towards securitisation the following year in the debate on push-backs between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the blame game not only expanded to “left-wing activists and crooked lawyers [who] abuse human rights to encourage and propagate migration”, but also to “the cooperation of unworldly judges, for whom, by the way, no one has ever voted” (02.12.2020_EP_TomVandendriessche_ID). The attack on the separation of powers, laws and institutions came to the fore here, as the MEP in question further undermined the European Convention on Human Rights, which in his words was “once intended to protect citizens of European countries from tyranny. Today, however, it has evolved into an instrument to force an open-border policy down the throats of our population” (*ibid*). While this came from a far-right party member, an intervention from the more mainstream ECR highlighted the underlying argument of the right-wing that woke culture has blurred the lines of reasoning: “And what are these root causes? Obviously, destabilization and war in neighbouring countries, but also – we must honestly say this here – extremely irresponsible, naive, often based on a kind of terrorism of political correctness naivety and that famous “Herzlich willkommen” in 2015” (02.12.2020_EP_JoachimStanisław Brudziński_ECR).

5.3.2.2 Italy

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, debates in the Italian parliament about migration have reflected not only dissatisfaction and a sense of isolation in response to what was often described as *a real invasion of Italy* (11.04.2011_IT_Isabella Bertolini_PdL), but also a different form of solidarity: one where Italy should serve as a transit country, not a final destination. As Isabella Bertolini, elected to the Chamber of Deputies for the People of Freedom party, stated in one of her speeches: “We are merely a bridge, and we hope their final destination is elsewhere in Europe. We should support these reunifications in other countries – we prefer to see these immigrants in France, Germany, or Spain, rather than wandering around our cities” (*ibid*).

Alongside debates on migration, a powerful trope emerged in Italian political discourse framing Italy as both a victim of EU inaction and a marginalized member of the EU. Despite its strategic position in Europe - geographically and politically - Italy was described as being treated with disregard. This sentiment was closely linked to a growing sense of Euroscepticism and calls for a more assertive Italian stance within the EU: “We must bang our fists on Europe’s table and demand not to be treated as second-class (‘serie B’) members of the European Union” (*ibid*). As Isabella Bertolini emphasised during a parliamentary session: “We contribute significantly to Europe, and we are not satisfied with crumbs. We do not accept a two-tier Europe, we do not want there to be favourites and outsiders, nor will we accept France continuing to impose its rules as it pleases. We want a Europe that matters – one that does not just hand down diktats and regulations but actually acts when faced with emergencies like this” (*ibid*).

The antagonistic stance toward the EU intensified in 2015 amid record arrivals of migrants to Italy and the lasting trauma of the 2013 Lampedusa tragedy. Criticism of the EU’s inaction came not only from the political right but also from within the socialist left. Left-wing voices expressed hope that the “deafening silence surrounding these deaths might finally shake the slumbering halls of Brussels and that Europe will assume responsibility and fulfil its role as a builder of a future rooted in hope” (22.04.2015_IT_Marco_Di Lello_PSI). This rhetoric also revived the question of Italy’s potential leadership within the European project: “We are among the founding members of Europe: let Europe, ‘whose conscience is far from clear’, give us a reason once again to be proud of our European citizenship” (*ibid*). This message was reinforced by the same voice: “We refuse to accept the triumph of selfishness and indifference, which in recent years have turned the European Union into a mere spectator, rather than a force for peace and solidarity” (*ibid*).

A similarly emotional tone was adopted during the same period by Fausto Raciti, a representative of the Democratic Party, who referred to the situation as a ‘massacre’, attributing responsibility not only to human traffickers but also - as he put it - to “let’s be honest, the significant indifference of Europe, which does not always live up to its own civilisation and history” (22.04.2015_IT_Fausto Raciti_PD). His speeches were framed as a trope of moral and political charge against the way Europe was handling “one of the greatest humanitarian crises the Mediterranean has ever seen” (*ibid*). He drew a contrast between political rhetoric and what he called a “quieter, less visible Italy” (*ibid*), one that operated beyond party divisions and outside the logic of political gain, which had nonetheless risen to the occasion. But, he argued, this Italy “can no longer be left alone” (*ibid*). According to Raciti, it is fundamentally unjust “for this great act of hope to rest solely on the shoulders of our country [Italy]” (*ibid*). His conclusion was a direct appeal to European responsibility: “European solidarity cannot be just a formula repeated at anniversary ceremonies. More than ever, European solidarity must now be translated into concrete action” (*ibid*).

After Italy tightened migration policy with the 2017 Minniti Decree - setting up 20 expulsion centres for irregular migrants - frustration with the EU’s Dublin system hardened into a new trope: legal formalism as a façade. A telling example of this discursive shift can be found in Gabriella Giammanco’s statement in which she described the existing European system as a ‘real bluff’ (16.05.2017_IT_Gabriella Giammanco_FI). Her remarks highlight how even regulatory clarity is re-narrated as deception. As she pointed out: “The asylum application cannot be filed in more than one Member State and must be processed by the country in which the applicant first entered the EU. This means that a migrant applying for asylum, after landing on Italian shores and entering the national migration management system, remains under Italy’s responsibility” (*ibid*). The ‘bluff’ she refers to lies in the fact that Italy, while formally responsible, often fails to carry out full identification procedures, allowing migrants to move northward and undermining the system’s enforceability, a point even EU authorities have criticized. Her criticism goes further, highlighting the lack of a binding legal basis for the hotspot system, the failure of EU relocation schemes, and the broader absence of real solidarity among member states.

In the debate on European solidarity, particularly in the context of criticism of the Dublin Regulation, the Italian right-wing political spectrum also made its voice heard. Fabio Rampelli, a representative of the Brothers of Italy party, framed his intervention around a quote by Charles Bukowski: “Born like this, (...) in a place where the masses turn idiots into successful heroes” (20.10.2021_IT_Fabio Rampelli_Fdl). This citation served as the backdrop to his remarks, offering a metaphor for what he described as the helplessness and absurdity of the EU's current migration policy. Rampelli offered strong criticism of the way the EU manages migration, stressing that “the solidarity we speak [...] will only be genuine when it is finally able to cripple the operations of human traffickers. He questioned: How is it possible that, in the third millennium, we are still unable to uproot this vile weed - a modern form of slavery - that drives desperate people to cross deserts in caravans (some dying along the way), or to board death boats within a smuggling network that feeds the traffickers’ web?” (*ibid*).

In contrast to the dominant voices that focus on migration as a threat, in the Italian parliamentary debates on migration in 2024, an alternative discourse of solidarity, responsibility, and historical memory emerged, voiced by Aboubakar Soumahoro who opposed the prevailing narrative of fear, calling instead for solidarity, responsibility, and historical awareness. He emphasized the ethical duty to cooperate with migrants’ countries of origin, to ensure people have the ‘right to remain’ - to live in peace and dignity in their own homelands. The reminder that “we Italians are migrants too” (27.11.2024_IT_Aboubakar Soumahoro NI) serves not only as a historical reflection but also as a moral call to shared responsibility.

5.3.2.3 Germany

In the case of Germany, European solidarity in the approach to migration and refugees is a constant reference point all the way from the early 2010s to the present day. Importantly, this is not restricted to members of particular parties, as representatives from across the political spectrum both call for and lament the lack of European solidarity in burden-sharing. There are, however, marked differences both between parties and over time in how solidarity is framed. At the outset, as the humanitarian storyline predominated in parliamentary debates, there was widespread consensus that a) the Dublin Regulations and the Common European Asylum System was not or no longer working and that b) a European solution was nonetheless vital as purely national policies would not suffice. This shifts markedly after 2015 when, having received by far the largest number of migrants during the so-called refugee crisis, German MPs appeal increasingly to enforcing European solidarity.

In a debate in 2021, Torsten Frei (CDU) complains about the lack of solidarity in taking in refugees as part of the EU-Turkey deal and provides detailed statistics meant to highlight Germany’s generosity in comparison to its European partners while neglecting to mention that the numbers are negligible in relation to the overall refugee population in Turkey. “And also, when it comes to taking in migrants: For example, we have taken in 240 unaccompanied minors, 242 children in need of treatment with their nuclear families, 1,553 family members, a total of 2,750 people. Now let me tell you something: that’s ten times as many as France has taken in and, incidentally, twice as many as all the other European countries put together. Mrs Amsberg, we cannot pursue an asylum policy that says: Germany will solve the problems for the whole of Europe. That is not possible. We don’t want that, it’s irresponsible and it will never lead to a common European asylum and migration policy” (24.03.2021_DE_Torsten Frei_CDU).

The most drastic shift, however, occurred in the most recent period after the Conservative CDU lost the 2021 elections and joined the ranks of the opposition. In turn, the alleged lack of European solidarity is used to back the argument for a renationalization of border controls. In a debate in 2024, Silke Launert (CDU) argued, “we have to decide for ourselves who comes to our country. As long as there is no secure border protection at the EU’s external borders, as long as many EU states do not comply with the Dublin rules - we were in Greece, a lot of things are going well, but it is a pure transfer station - and as long as

rows of refugees are only pushed on to Germany, it is necessary to carry out national border controls and also to turn back people without visas at the German borders" (5.12.2024_DE_Silke Launert_CDU). Crucially, the claim is justified with a very generalized claim about the lack of enforcement which is only substantiated with bland anecdotal reference to a personal visit to the EU's external frontier whose faint praise in fact contradicts the speaker's own conclusion.

5.3.2.4 Poland

Polish dissatisfaction with the EU's migration and asylum policies has significantly influenced its migration debate since 2015. The EU has been often used as a scapegoat, being labelled as a German-led source of migration-related problems and inadequate policy solutions: "We must say this clearly: the government of the European Union are to blame for this catastrophe - EU authorities that did nothing to defend the Union's borders. In particular, the German authorities are to blame here, as they widely opened Europe's doors to Islamic immigrants. In the name of what? In the name of their own interests and a disastrous policy of multiculturalism" (09.02.2016_PL_Anna Maria Siarkowska_K'15).

On several occasions it has been even presented as a threat to the Polish sovereignty. As indicated by one of the ministers in the right-wing Law and Justice government in 2016: "... such a [relocation] proposal obviously violates the sovereignty of a member state, not only Poland, but all EU member states, and actually limits independence in the context of making decisions regarding the shaping of migration, security policy and the verification of individuals arriving in Poland" (01.12.2016_PL_Szymon Szyrkowski vel Sęk_PiS).

In this way, throughout the entire analysed period (2015-2024), Polish politicians across the political spectrum have either enabled or directly contributed to false claims regarding the role of the European Union in the migration policies of its member states. Blaming the EU has proven beneficial to both conservatives and liberals, who often exploit the general lack of knowledge about the inner workings of the EU and its specific role in migration policies. In this context, the liberal Civic Coalition has contributed to more benign forms of misleading claims that portray the EU as an external and intrusive actor, rather than as a collective of states with voting power, in which Poland is a significant political player. Meanwhile, the right-wing Law and Justice party has not hesitated to spread conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated claims, such as the following: "The TV signal was turned off so that Poles would not learn about the decisions of the European Union (...). The European Union is implementing the migration pact. What does this mean? It means that migrants who entered Europe illegally may be, and will be, relocated to Poland. If we do not accept them, we will have to work hard to support them in other EU countries. Ladies and gentlemen, our voters are afraid every day, but we will always defend the Polish national interest" (21.12.2023_PL_Józef Szczurek-Żelazko, PiS).

5.3.3 Conclusions

The *popular post-truth* scale of embeddedness, as our analysis has shown, has come out clearly within storylines that are inherently divisive, most notably the one which contests and reevaluates the principle of European solidarity. What has become a dominating discourse has undergone a significant evolution, shifting from perceiving solidarity as a normative principle underpinning European cooperation to solidarity being a strategic instrument expressing national grievances and creating deeply polarised political landscapes. Across all analysed cases, the EU has increasingly been framed by both right- and left-wing political actors as an ineffective and often disengaged institution, complicit in reproducing rather than remedying the structural dimensions of the migration issue. This shift is particularly evident in the aftermath of the 2015 so-called refugee crisis, which undermined the EU's standing as a moral actor in international politics. Within dominating discourses of this period, the EU is depicted not as a source of solutions but rather as a root cause of migration problems. This rhetoric is grounded primarily in an **emotional logic**,

whereby solidarity ceases to function as a shared normative ideal and instead becomes a contested stake in the struggle for hegemonic meanings and the affective identity of Europe. Arguments no longer need to satisfy requirements of logical coherence; **their emotional potency** and capacity to mobilise an affective community of resentment suffice.

Within this discursive space, we have also observed not only a dialectic of emotions and accusations but also its interweaving with metaphorical references to **moral obligations and Europe's historical duties** towards its own value system. What resurfaces in the analysis within the solidarity storyline is therefore in fact the lack of such solidarity. The arguments formulated in such debates often point to the deliberate erosion of trust in supranational mechanisms, enacted through a narrative of externalising blame. As the result, even though the concept of European solidarity is not contested as a value in itself, it is preemptively delegitimised through the strategic framing of the EU as politically biased and detached from 'real' problems.

5.4. Deep Post-Truth Scale of embeddedness: *Post-truth infused securitization of migration*

5.4.1 Introduction

We observe a rise in so-called **deep post-truth** when post-truth tropes and arguments become institutionalized as part of policy action. This occurs not only when they are structurized within political discourse but also when they become embedded in legal and policy frameworks, serving as the basis or condition for practice. Notably, our analysis includes not only instances of discourse institutionalization but also significant attempts to position post-truth discourse as the primary driver of reform and policy change. While not a universal facet of migration discourses in all countries studied, the one element that has become distinctively visible across cases is the securitized approach to migration. In other words, the claim that migration has to be dealt with as a matter of the security domain or rather as a threat to the security of the receiving countries finds its expression in the increasing prevalence of warrants that have a totalizing effect on the whole discourse. One of such broader warrants or normative underpinnings is „migrants are dangerous“ - a dominant assumption that, in the debates in several countries we focused on, has taken on a life of its own. Hence, for significant parts of the elite public represented by members of parliament this notion of migrants as a threat to be dealt with constitutes a self-evident truth that no longer requires evidence to back it up.

Securitizing language and depictions of migrants and migration in terms of risks, uncontrollable masses, criminals and existential threats has become an important facilitating condition for emergence of post-truth imbued storylines, which in time spread across political discourses. Securitization of migration, here understood as “the process of integrating discursively and institutionally an issue into security frameworks that emphasize policing, control, and defense” (Bourbeau, 2015) has profoundly influenced European discourses and policies regulating human mobility (Ibrahim, 2005; Dover, 2008; Léonard and Kaunert, 2022). We observe a strong correlation between the already high levels of securitization of migration and the emergence of deep post-truth.

At the same time, we are not positing that all supporters of a securitized approach to migration are actively using tools of misinformation and disinformation and are basing their arguments on post-truth tropes. However, even politicians that may not consciously subscribe to post-truth and do not deliberately seek to undermine the epistemic order, evidence-based policy-making, or existing knowledge are operating in a discursive space partly shaped by post-truth arguments and assumptions. As a result, the fact that, for example, a German centre-left politician no longer feels the need to explain, illustrate and justify why they treat migration as a security issue is tied to a gradual process of a discursive shift that in turn was

substantially promoted by political actors employing post-truth messaging. Therefore, it is critically important to conduct this form of archaeology of discourses to retroactively determine grosso modo the extent to which the institutionalization of a securitized understanding of migration was in fact rooted in post-truth.

Similarly to post-truth, securitization is not uniform. The process may be driven by different types of security grammar and practice, ranging from technocratic risk management and population control to more politicized, often polarized, and traditional national security frameworks that embrace exceptional security language and measures in response to perceived existential threats (Wæver, 1995; Corry, 2012). Both modes of securitization may contribute to prominence (or lack of it) of deep post-truth embeddedness in different ways. Technocratic securitization may have a twofold effect. On the one hand, it may lead to the depoliticization and “expertization” of migration discourse; on the other, it may open the door to manipulation. After all, it often operates under a veil of secrecy as a “black box” technology, where “some secret and sensitive data” can be used to justify any type of claim about migrants and migration (Bellanova and Duez, 2012; Anwar, 2025). A more traditional, national security-centred mode of securitization is more straightforward. It is often fuelled by the “politics of fear” and accompanied by highly emotional, hegemonic, and manipulative language. We find that the invocation of a state of emergency, which is typical for this type of securitization, enables a break not only from normalized forms of politics and policy practice but also from established modes of debate and political discourse. In this way, prolonged and successful securitization of migration paves the way for the mobilization of post-truth-centred arguments, which build upon already sedimented emotional and polarized language, as well as a disregard for the norms of liberal democratic, evidence-based policymaking.

Given the differences between the cases we studied in terms of scale of migration and migrants’ countries of origin, their historical experiences of migration as well as the evolution of social and political approaches to migrants and border control, it is hardly surprising that we also see a variety of securitizing discourses. These include but are not restricted to a) the storyline of migrants as a **national security threat** because they are (Islamist) terrorists and radical extremists that seek to infiltrate and harm the native population, b) the storyline of migrants as **criminals** that are more prone to (violent) crime and sexual violence than incumbent populations, c) the storyline of migrants as a **challenge to state sovereignty and order** whose allegedly uncontrolled and unregistered influx undermines the ability of the state to secure its borders and provide security within its borders.

Yet, there are some overarching observations that hold by and large for all country cases from Spain to Poland. For one, parliamentary debates in each of the countries featured the presence of securitizing claims and storylines on migration. We also observed an increase in the prevalence and persistence of securitizing storylines relative to alternative storylines, with securitizing storylines decrying the danger and threat emanating from migrants peaking towards the end of the period under investigation. What is more, while right-wing and populist parties employ the most alarmist language, securitizing narratives are not confined to the political margins. The use of security-based justifications for measures such as welfare cuts, integration tests, or asylum reforms is evident across the political spectrum, including among centrist factions.

The discursive shifts across the different case studies cannot, however, be ascribed in their entirety to machinations and perception operations by ideologically motivated political actors. Several triggering events in the real world laid the groundwork for storylines to be built that portrayed migrants as a danger. For one, a series of terrorist attacks committed by Islamists, some of whom had entered the EU as refugees, played a crucial role in changing popular beliefs about migrants’ and refugees’ nature and intentions. Chief among these events were the series of attacks at the Bataclan nightclub and other venues

in Paris in November 2015. In addition, there were country-specific attacks such as the Nice truck attack in July 2016, the attack on the Brussels metro in March 2016, the truck attack at the Berlin Christmas market in December 2016, the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017, the attack on La Rambla in Barcelona in August 2017, an attack in Vienna in November 2020 that each in their own right appeared to demonstrate the potentially lethal consequence of unimpeded migration flows.

In addition, other specific events fundamentally changed the manner in which migrants and migration were being talked about in public discourse in the direction of a securitized framing. In the case of Germany, a turning point was New Year's Eve in 2015/16 when during celebrations in Cologne scores of women were molested and robbed by mostly Arab and North African men. In Poland, on the other hand, a focusing event came in July 2021 when Belarus begun to sponsor Middle Eastern migrants entering the EU via Poland.

Having said that, the securitization of discourses on migrants and migration has not only shifted the manner in which the public debates about the topic of migration, the securitized framing of migration has had tangible effects on policymaking by arguably paving the way for a range of security-centred policies that often reach beyond migration and migrants: collection of biometric data, increased surveillance programmes, restrictions on migrants' freedom of movement and choice of places of residence, collaboration between refugee agencies and security services, expansion of detention centres, designation of a growing number of "safe countries" leading all the way to the outsourcing of asylum processing to third countries and even predictive risk profiling.

5.4.2 Examples from the field

Moving beyond these general findings, it is vital to avoid the post-factual trap ourselves and present compelling evidence from the case studies analyzed as part of the research endeavour. Since securitization's key feature is to approach disparate policy areas through the sole lens of security, securitized storylines that rely strongly on post-truth tropes for backup also manifest in different aspects of migration and migration policy. While these extracts should serve to substantiate the overall argument laid out above, they come with the caveat that the overall sample does not allow for hard quantitative claims about the prevalence of one type of storyline relative to another.

5.4.2.1 European Parliament

The culmination of the securitisation logic in the European Parliament came in 2020 with the debate on push-backs at the Croatian border, and in 2021 on the humanitarian and security situation on the Polish-Lithuanian borders of the European Union. By this time, the prevalence of arguments evoking fake news, untruths and disinformation was evident, not only because of the influence of American rhetoric in the wake of Donald Trump's first presidency, but also because of what has been termed hybrid and information warfare coming from Russia and its allies. Evidence of the use of post-truth vocabulary in what can be characterised as a post-truth trope comes from an MEP from the mainstream European People's Party claimed:

"I find it unbelievable that here, for the umpteenth time, we have to listen to lies, false information and fake news about so-called illegal push-backs by Croatia. The only source of information for such claims are biased non-governmental organizations that have their own political agenda of denigrating Croatia..." (02.12.2020_EP_Tomislav Sokol_PPE).

When presented with evidence of large scale, violent pushbacks, the MEP, himself from Croatia, responded: "such people [illegal migrants] who violate the laws are telling lies. These are your sources of

information, and I honestly cannot trust such people. You may be able to, but I do not" (02.12.2020_EP_Tomislav Sokol_PPE). This claim was backed up by a fellow Croatian from the same party grouping, who went further to state: "I would just like to tell you that Croatia, unfortunately, has real painful memories. After Serbia's aggression against the Republic of Croatia, we had thousands of migrants, so do not doubt Croatia's intentions and **do not talk about something you do not understand and do not know.**" (02.12.2020_EP_Sunčana Glavak_PPE). The black box of national suffering is invoked here, which does not allow for any statements to the contrary — evidence of a colonisation of truth.

The European Parliament has also played host to conspiracy theories such as the great replacement, surfacing in highly securitized context of war in Ukraine and weaponisation of migration on the Eastern borders. As a member of the mainstream EPP family remarked in 2024, "This debate, however, in its essence, is about whether or not we are able to preserve our European identity, our way of life, norms, culture and traditions. **The promotion of mass migration threatens all that.** It is, in reality, a **social transformation project** that is imposed upon the European people without, in most cases, ever asking them about their opinion and consent. Illegal mass migration leads to the disintegration of society. It breaks down European norms. **It destroys public security.**" (04.10.2024_EP_Balázs Hidvéghi_EPP). The fact that such theories are uttered in the European Parliament by a member of a mainstream party family is indicative of the strength of securitizing discourses in fuelling the most evident of post-truth tropes in contemporary parliamentary debates on migration.

National security discourses also entered into the European parliamentary debates strongly at this time, evoking arguments that aimed to colonise the truth through identity logics: you are not from here, you do not know our history, therefore you are wrong. This type of argumentation leaves little room for critical debate and any use of evidence is rejected as absurd, ignorant or hypocritical. It also allows for totalising and xenophobic arguments to flourish, wherein existential threats to national and 'European' civilisation come to the fore. As the following statement shows:

"I hear that you are criticizing Croatia. **You have no grounds to criticize Croatia, Greece, or Bulgaria, because we, our countries, protect you from terrorists, from Islamists, from jihadists.** Because we stop those who come to blow up European cities, and every country must protect its borders, and it is a sovereign country, and none of you can want sovereign countries to let terrorists into their territory. But I'll tell you why what you're doing is hypocrisy, gross hypocrisy. Because none of you - those who claim to be very concerned - have set a personal example. Raise your hand, any of you who have welcomed an Afghan terrorist or a jihadist into your home, raise your hand. Is there one? In your living room, in your bedroom, living with your children. Wait, is there one? No, there isn't! Then please don't be hypocritical and duplicitous." (02.12.2020_EP_Ангел Джамбазки_ECR).

In 2021, when the debate centered on the humanitarian situation on the EU-Belarusian border, the underlying warrant across party lines was '*let's not be naive*'. Let's not be naive to think that Lukashenko is acting alone (Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel_Renew); let's not be naive that we can protect Europe without walls (Manfred Weber_PPE); naiveté will cost you a lot, including the entire European Union (Beata Kempa_ECR). Whoever is against this logic is labelled a hypocrite and liar (Nicolaus Fest_ID), or a 'wailing and crying left-wing extremist' (Jaak Madison_ID). In this environment, any measures to protect the people, whether they be national or European, are legitimised, and laws and institutions that stand in the way are considered 'dogma'. As an MEP from the far-right Identity and Democracy group stated: "The key word must be deterrence: we must defend our borders, deport all illegal migrants, **allow pushbacks**, and reform our asylum system so that it no longer serves as a pathway to immigration" (01.19.2021_EP_Nicolas Bay_ID).

In a debate that followed at the end of that year, the same MEP again delegitimized international law and those institutions abiding by it in stating: "But as usual, the European Commission is conspicuously absent, obsessively and ideologically refusing to spend a single cent to fund the barrier, while scrutinizing to ensure **the sacred dogma of non-refoulement** is strictly adhered to" (11.10.2021_22_Nicolas Bay_EP, ID).

While in 2021, the explicit undermining of international law was reserved to the far-right, by 2024, the legitimisation of push-backs was institutionalised into law through the mainstream European People's Party, with the former Council President and Polish Prime Minister from the centrist coalition government, Donald Tusk, at the head. In an environment of securitisation, the dogma becomes 'common sense' and strength in the wake of woke weakness or high-brow legal solutions, for European civilisation is at stake. As a parliamentarian from the far-right Europe of Sovereign Nations put it:

"Politicians hate this common sense. They say that there are obstacles in the way, that we don't know the file. Their solutions are so much more sophisticated: change nothing. If we regain common sense right away, in a few years' time we'll find it hard to believe that we could have let ourselves go so far and fallen so low. But if we don't pull ourselves together, historians will be looking for a long time to find out why such great and powerful peoples let themselves die without reacting. There is still time. Let's take action" (23.10.2024_EP_Sarah Knafo_ESN).

5.4.2.2 Italy

Between 2018 and 2024, the Italian discursive field on migration underwent a notable transformation, marked by the mainstreaming of securitarian logics and the gradual embedding of post-truth into legislative and rhetorical repertoires. The underlying normative assumption that migrants are up to no good and therefore need to be checked and controlled informs an intervention by Bordonali Simona from Italy's right-wing Lega in 2024. Arguing in favour of a proposed law that among other things allowed authorities to check migrants' phones and tablets to verify their identity, she said:

"There was an outcry, claiming that the privacy of migrants arriving in our country is not being protected. Dear colleagues, I imagine that each of you, if stopped on the street or in your car by the police and asked to provide identification, would do so. And yet we are supposed to defend those who enter our country illegally, who do not assist the police in identifying them, and we are supposed to protect their privacy. No, we do not agree. We want to guarantee the safety of our country and our citizens!" (Applause from the deputies of the Lega-Salvini Premier group) "We need to know who is entering our country, and if they do not help us learn this, we are obliged - not 'we have the right,' but 'we are obliged'-to discover their identity" (27.11.2024_8_Simona Bordonali_IT_LEGA).

What makes this claim such a compelling case of post-truth is that the speaker does not provide any evidence that migrants are in fact actively trying to conceal their identity but uses a flawed anecdotal comparison to make their case. When a regular citizen gets stopped for an identity check, there is presumably a probable cause to question them. By likening this scenario to identity checks on migrants, the unstated implication is clearly that migrants are not to be trusted. This claim can only succeed if the listeners have already been sufficiently primed to believe this warrant about migrants' alleged deviousness to be true.

An example that illustrates the generalized assumption of migrants as dangerous exceedingly well comes from a debate in 2018 where Salvatore Deidda, an MP for the Brothers of Italy, stated:

"Regarding immigration, remember that hundreds of Algerians are entering through direct landings in Sardinia - people who are not fleeing any war or hunger. Algeria is a sovereign state with a government:

they arrive by the hundreds, and don't think this is only the island's problem, because these individuals, after receiving deportation orders following thefts, muggings, and robberies, come here to the mainland. Their only way to catch a flight is by taking a ferry - they come here and then disappear, becoming ghosts. So, we must say - and remember - that borders must be defended, and we need a naval blockade not only from Libya, but one that protects the entire Mediterranean across the whole North African front" (27.06.2018_30_Salvatore Deidda_IT_Fdl).

Whereas the policy proposal targets migrants in general, the speaker focuses on a very specific group of migrants, Algerians, that allegedly – no proof is presented – have no legitimate grounds to enter Italian soil. Then, the focus shifts to another subset of these Algerians, i.e. those that commit crimes and then avoid deportation by disappearing from view – again, no figures or other evidence is put forward – to make the case for a naval blockade. A naval blockade, however, would restrict or endanger migration routes for all migrants, the vast majority of whom are not Algerian criminals.

Unsubstantiated allegations of a grand international conspiracy tied to migration flows also make an entry in the Italian parliament. In 2018, Giorgia Meloni of Brothers of Italy, then in opposition, used a debate about policing NGO ships to attack George Soros as the mastermind behind it all. Soros, of course, has been a target of post-truth assaults for decades since his opponents play on anti-semitic prejudices to promote lies about his and his organisation's intentions. "The port closures are a good move - I heard Minister Salvini say that it's a historic proposal from Fratelli d'Italia, and I'm glad he listened to us. It's also right to say that NGO ships that decide to bring migrants to port should be seized and their crews prosecuted for human trafficking and aiding illegal immigration (Applause from the members of the Fratelli d'Italia group). That's good, because we'll see how many ships Soros can afford to buy - but it doesn't solve the problem" (27.06.2018_12_Giorgia Meloni_IT_Fdl). This structure anchored in moral binaries, exaggeration, and emotional appeal shifted the burden of proof away from institutional actors and onto the moral character of migrants and their defenders.

5.4.2.3 Germany

In Germany, in line with the prevailing humanitarian framing of migration, securitizing policies were initially still justified with a nod to humanitarian concerns. Thus, during a 2016 debate discussing the EU-Turkey refugee deal, CDU MP Andreas Nick argued in favour of securitizing the Aegean sea by stating that "it is not a fair and humanitarian solution for people to risk their lives and the lives of their children, to entrust themselves to smugglers and traffickers in order to cross the Aegean Sea in unsafe boats and embark on the long and arduous journey along the Balkan route. This situation must be brought to an end, above all for humanitarian reasons" (12.05.2016_DE_Andreas Nick_CDU).

In more recent years, however, the underlying assumption of migrants as dangerous and potentially prone to sexual violence gained currency in parliament. In a debate in 2024, the AFD MP Baumann justified his support for legalizing pushbacks of asylum seekers with a highly emotionalized rhetorical question that lacked any evidence of actual wrongdoing by migrants or asylum seekers: "Every day that we stop the uncontrolled mass influx sooner saves lives. How many violent criminals, gangsters and Islamists could we keep out from now on? How many parents would be spared the grief of their stabbed children? How many women would not be raped and traumatised? If even a single gang rape could be prevented, the psychological destruction of a single woman in Germany, the measure would be justified, ladies and gentlemen" (05.12.2024_DE_Bernd Baumann_AFD). Such a claim that insinuates sexual deviancy as a core feature of the migrant collective can only take root if the warrant that migrants are dangerous has become deeply entrenched in public debates.

Border security and especially national control over borders also features more prominently over time. Thus, Bernd Baumann argued in a debate in 2018 that Germany had completely lost control over its borders. “Almost 19,000 migrants this November, in just one month, most of them without passports or papers - this is actually unique in world history for states that have the rule of law. Everyone enters Germany without a passport, but hardly anyone leaves” (01.02.2018_DE_Bernd Baumann_AFD). Not only is the initial claim that most migrants lack passports spurious, dubious and unsubstantiated, it is then followed up with a generalized claim that, in fact, all migrants enter without passports.

5.4.2.4 Austria

Whereas in other countries such as Germany in the years leading up to 2015 a conciliatory tone and apparent need to justify a security-cantered approach with a nod to humanitarian concerns prevailed, parliamentary debates in Austria had at the time already shifted to a different plane where migrants – with little emphasis on distinguishing between migrants and refugees – were broadly deemed a threat to economic and national security. Heinz-Christian Strache, the then-leader of the FPÖ likened the arrival of migrants via the Balkans to the medieval times of migration and denied that humanitarian concerns applied since allegedly only 20 percent of migrants hailed from Syria and Iraq (27.01.2016_AT_Heinz-Christian Strache_FPÖ), a clear case of cherry-picking statistics which he failed to back up with specific evidence. What is more, after selectively referencing official statistics, Strache presented alternative statistics that his party assumed to be closer to the truth; yet again without evidence: “The EU Commission currently estimates that 60 percent [of migrants] have a purely economic background. In my opinion, the figures are likely to be higher than the EU Commission admits. We are thinking it is 80 percent” (27.01.2016_AT_Heinz-Christian Strache_FPÖ). These claims are clearly based on the warrant that migrants do not mean well and are out to deceive and take advantage of the populations. Irrespective of whether or not Strache’s claim is in fact true, the blatant disregard for official statistics and the institutions they represent clearly makes this representative example a case of post-truth messaging.

5.4.2.5 Poland

In 2015 when large numbers of migrants arrived in Europe, Patryk Jaki of Poland’s right-wing Law and Justice said: “The Prime Minister and representatives of the Polish government have based their entire narrative today on the claim that Poland is safe, that the Islamic State poses no threat to us, and that the country’s services and institutions guarantee our full security. In that case, I would like to ask a question. This is easy to verify. Just look at the United States. The United States, in its recent statement, clearly indicates that among the refugees there will also be terrorists, representatives of the Islamic State” (16.09.2015_PL_Patryk Jaki_PiS). Here, a single general statement that there may be terrorists among the refugees is deemed sufficient proof to argue that any refugees coming to Poland from countries like Syria and Iraq would amount to a security threat. The underlying and unstated assumption being that they, the migrants, are dangerous and prone to extremism. Migrants as a collective group are taken to be responsible for the acts of individuals.

In 2021, the Polish debate on migration underwent significant securitization, resulting in a decline in the quality of discourse and totalisation of “truth”. This period was characterized by an increase in emotionally charged, often racist, and unsubstantiated claims about migrants (e.g. claims that irregular migrants crossing the Polish border are zoophiles or paedophiles). In this regard, the Polish-Belarusian border crisis acted as a focusing event, which enabled institutionalization of post-truth discourse within Polish migration and border protection policies. The intensification of securitization and the accompanying militarization of discourse facilitated the proliferation of totalising claims regarding irregular migrant crossings at the Polish-Belarusian border. Many restrictive policies were not driven by evidence supporting that migrants are a national security threat, but rather a possibility that it may be true. In 2021, the Polish government declared a state of emergency at the border, restricting access for citizens, NGOs, and journalists. This restricted

area remains enforced in a modified form, enabling the government and security services to control the majority of information about border developments. This control has fostered speculation and disinformation, exacerbated by the high level of political polarization in Poland.

The discourse further escalated in 2022 with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, linking the border crisis to Vladimir Putin's hostile actions towards the West. The language of war and hybrid warfare dominated the debates, prompting calls for rapid and decisive security responses at the border, regardless a serious of concerns voiced by NGOs, academics, journalists and some politicians. With security as the only acceptable warrant, migrants were portrayed as "Lukashenka's militia" and as weapons used by Putin to destabilize the state. The following examples show how the sense of insecurity and urgency has created space for the reproduction of post-truth tropes, which have dominated the political discussion on this particular crisis in Poland.

"These are not civilians; they are militants, they are invaders who killed our soldier. So please (Applause) do not treat this in any other way. And stop complicating the law, because soon our soldiers, our security personnel will have to go on patrols with a lawyer to tell them whether they can use weapons to defend the borders and their safety or not. Polish soldiers must have the right to use weapons at the border to protect our security, to protect citizens, to protect the borders" (11.07.2024_PL_Witold Tumanowicz_Konfederacja).

"I want to emphasize that the exceptional nature of what we refer to as a specific kind of hybrid warfare at the Polish borders means that we must employ exceptional legal measures. This should accompany our discussion on the matter" (10.06.2024_PL_Andrzej Grzyb_PSL).

"We are submitting amendments that, first and foremost, clearly state that a soldier has the right to resort to direct coercive measures, including the right to use a weapon in the event of a simple breach of the state border. The aim is to ensure that the soldier has the freedom to make that decision—that it is he who determines the course of action" (12.07.2024_PL_Marcin Ociepa_Konfederacja).

What is striking in both of these examples is that the speakers do not appear to see need to justify or even explain their highly loaded contentions. The claims they are making are presented as self-evident truths. Accordingly, one is led to assume that the warrant that migrants, all migrants, constitute a threat to national security has become institutionalized and deeply rooted in national discourses.

5.4.3 Conclusion

The securitized storyline of migration building and based, in part, on post-truth tropes has had a far-reaching impact on the framing and policymaking in the field of migration across the cases studied. For one, the securitized storylines deeply embedded and increasingly dominant status shows up in its ability to override and sideline previously prevailing storylines along with their underlying warrants. This is particularly evident in the case of the humanitarian storyline conceiving of migration as primarily a humanitarian concern that ought not to be subject to politicization or at least not to polarization.

Secondly, there is a large class of statements that forward the claim that migrants are dangerous and that migrants or at least a large share among them are criminals. A prominent sub-class of claims that center on the "they are dangerous" warrant, is the argument that migrants are sexual predators and rapists or at least more likely to perpetrate sexual violence than native populations. The implication of these claims is that they are frequently feeding on post-truth tropes or treated as self-evident truths that do not require significant supportive evidence. The same process of discursively moving from anecdotal or imagined

individual cases to deduct concepts and policies for the entire group of migrants comes out in the claim that some migrants are terrorists, which is especially prominent in Poland, Austria and the European Parliament.

A third group of securitizing claims about migrants and migration are those that treat migration and migrants as a threat to the security of the nation, both understood as the national territory and its borders as well as the nation's identity and cohesion. Critically, for the time being these types of statements – especially when they are underwritten by postfactual claims – are still predominantly a preserve of far-right and extremist parties. At the same time, we observe an increasing frequency with which parliaments play host to conspiracy theories alleging that a cabal of national and international evil actors are trying to use migrants to attack individual countries' national identity. The most extreme version, encountered above all in the European Parliament, is the completely unfounded conspiracy theory of a great replacement which alleges that variously denoted elites seek to use migration to change the demographic makeup and national identities of European countries and societies.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of 60 debates across 6 case studies within a 14 year timeframe has provided a rich dataset from which numerous conclusions may be drawn. Yet one could argue that parliamentary debates are the space of largely filtered discourse unreminiscent of Habermasian fragmented semi-publics that fuel competing truths (Neuman, 2024). This is not the space of the Dark Net, nor radical social media posts or online rabbit holes where conspiracy theories thrive. The biggest risk of analysing parliamentary debates was not finding any post-truth tropes within the discourses. Indeed, in many of the debates analysed, there were only a few sprinklings of what we could categorise as post-truth tropes, often linking populist rhetoric with unsubstantiated claims. This, one could posit, is a 'normal' performative aspect of parliamentary debates. In our findings, we categorised this sprinkling of post-truth tropes on the *trivial* scale of post-truth embeddedness. This meant that certain outrageous comments, lies, unsubstantiated claims — amongst other post-truth tropes — were simply rejected or did not spread. What is important to highlight is *why* these post-truth tropes did not spread, or what were the *conditions* which disabled their proliferation. On the other hand, parliamentary debates can be seen as a sort of litmus test for the permeability of post-truth into what is the mainstream or core of political discourse. Our findings show that there are certain conditions that become ripe for not only the spread and popularisation of post-truth tropes, but for their deeper embeddedness into particular understandings of migration and migrants that inform policy outcomes. We assess the conditions of both the resilience to and spread of post-truth tropes below.

6.1 Conditions of resilience to post-truth

In our findings, we point to three conditions of resilience to post-truth tropes: (1) the **low level of politicisation** of the migration 'issue'. While migration is often used as a pawn in the 'politics of fear', there are moments where it stays at the level of technocratic legislative process. While our sampling focused on critical junctures within migration policy-making, including in reaction to external pressures, there were indeed some debates in which there was largely bipartisan agreement in which post-truth tropes were simply sidelined, if they appeared at all. (2) A high degree of **bipartisan consensus** with strong normative coherence also proved resilient to post-truth tropes. Yet the type of dominating discourse that produced normative coherence is key: in our study, dominating discourses with humanitarian, human-rights based underpinnings proved largely impervious to post-truth tropes. Spain is a notable outlier in this regard, wherein post-truth tropes were found to infuse humanitarian discourses. (3) Finally, and perhaps logically, it is the **incompatibility** of certain types of post-truth tropes with dominating discourses that doesn't allow for post-truth to spread. In the case of Spain, post-truth tropes were compatible with humanitarian

underpinnings—they reinforced the human-rights lens by trivialising legal frameworks and vilifying certain legal norms and standards. Yet in the other cases, post-truth tropes that cast migrants as invaders and criminals were at odds with dominant normative assumptions when humanitarianism was at the centre of policy-making. We argue that in these cases, the dominating discourses were *resilient* to post-truth.

6.2 Conditions in which post-truth spreads and thrives

Yet, in some debates across the case studies, and increasingly after the 2014-16 European refugee crisis, we noted a certain shift in the quality of discourse that allowed for more post-truth tropes to seep in and become structurized in the debates. From 2019 onwards, a deeper level of embeddedness of post-truth tropes could be seen in some case studies wherein discourses had become particularly securitized. The research underscores three contexts across the case studies in which post-truth becomes more prominent: (1) The first constitutes the context of increased **polarisation** of within parliamentary settings. In our study, we found that post-truth tropes stick to arguments that are highly antagonistic and emotionalised; instead of discussing facts or solving problems in legislative frameworks, parliamentary debates turn into metaphorical wrestling matches, wherein blame games, sore feelings or downright hateful rage override meritocratic discussion. This was most clearly evident in discourses wherein the principle of solidarity underwent an existential crisis, not least surrounding the European refugee crisis of 2014-2016. An erosion of solidarity also signals and erosion of trust – between Member States (MS), between MS and the European Union, between state authorities and non-governmental organisations, and towards migrants themselves.

In these conditions, we noted a distinct rise and popularisation of fear-induced falsehoods, leading to the second condition in which post-truth tropes thrive, (2) **the mainstreaming of radicalised discourses**. The last decade has seen the rise of far-right anti-immigrant parties with more influential voices in parliament, notably in Poland, Italy, Austria, and more recently in Spain, Germany and the European Union. As parties such as VOX in Spain, AfD in Germany and Konfederacja in Poland become greater forces within parliament, sometimes acting as kingmakers in political reshuffles, mainstream parties increasingly pander to simplistic, easily-digestible and sometimes radically misleading tropes which divert attention from other issues. In a sense, the fringes of the political spectrum thus provide mainstream parties with content in the game of inciting moral panic for political gain.

(3) Thirdly, the **evolution of securitized discourses of migration** in most of the countries we analysed hints at another angle of post-truth's insidious impact on political culture and political outcomes. For one, there appears to be a mutually reinforcing relationship between securitization of migration and post-truth tropes. If you adhere to a discourse that posits that we are faced with a dramatic situation that warrants recourse to emergency measures then it also becomes easier to accept novel forms of political arguments that rely on highly questionable evidence.

An even further-reaching interlinkage between postfactual tropes and an institutionalized securitization approach to migration is that politicians may no longer see the need to justify their support for securitized policies because their tenets are seen as self-evident. What gets lost in the process is that politicians may therefore be genuinely unaware that the arguments and policies they propose originate to a substantial degree in post-truth tropes. Even worse, if securitized discourses are well-established and rooted in the mainstream, politicians from centre-ground parties that are, in fact, very conscious of their arguments' insalubrious origins, can credibly feign ignorance and jump on the bandwagon of securitizing migrants and migration policy.

6.3 Gaps filled and possibilities for future research

In recent years, post-truth dynamics have gained traction as a subject of academic inquiry, particularly in studies examining how misinformation and populist narratives shape political discourse. Initial explorations focused largely on social media as the primary avenue for post-truth proliferation, emphasizing how online platforms enable the rapid spread of misleading or emotionally charged claims (Newman, 2019; MacMullen, 2020). Research has highlighted the role of social media in reinforcing echo chambers, where discourse aligns with pre-existing beliefs (Sunstein, 2017), contributing to the fragmentation of the public sphere and complicating the pursuit of shared truths (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2018). In migration studies, recent works have examined how post-truth narratives intersect with securitization and populist rhetoric, portraying migration as a crisis or a security threat (Bello & Léonard, 2023), while others have delved into the humanitarian consequences of such narratives (Squire, 2020). However, much of this literature is broad, often emphasizing social media's influence or taking a global perspective, which provides limited insight into the specific mechanisms of post-truth politics within established democratic institutions, such as parliamentary debates. Studies of parliamentary debates tend to emphasize the legal or ideological framing of migration (Stoyanova & Smet, 2022) but rarely analyze the subtleties of post-truth as a dynamic tool within these debates, where political actors may shift between evidence-based arguments and post-truth rhetoric. Some works have explored citizens' perspectives on migration policies (Vaughan-Williams, 2021), yet they do not examine the elite discourse mechanisms that shape policy at its legislative core. Furthermore, there is a notable gap in comparative studies that account for the varied manifestations of post-truth politics across EU member states, where distinct political, cultural, and historical contexts influence the trajectory and institutionalization of these narratives.

Our research addresses this gap by focusing specifically on how post-truth discourse operates within parliamentary debates on migration and border security in the EU. By proposing a three-level typology of post-truth (banal, popular, and deep) and applying Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA), we have offered a structured approach to assess the depth and institutionalization of post-truth narratives in policymaking. Our comparative study spans selected EU countries, including Poland, Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain, and the European Parliament, and considers the unique political contexts and “focusing events” that prompted significant parliamentary discussions on migration. Through this lens, we illuminate the extent to which post-truth tropes have become embedded within formal political discourse, providing empirical insights that reveal the layered nature of post-truth in democratic governance and addressing the critical, yet underexplored, intersection of post-truth politics and institutional policymaking in Europe.

Future research could build on this foundation by examining how post-truth discourse evolves across legislative cycles, levels of governance, and policy domains beyond migration, including climate, gender, and public health. While this study concentrated on parliaments, similar dynamics may influence communication in ministries, regulatory agencies, or municipal governments, arenas where rhetorical tropes often gain traction under less public scrutiny and weaker discursive constraints. A diachronic approach tracing the historical evolution of storylines, combined with longitudinal analysis of their persistence, transformation, or dissipation across political contexts, could shed light on broader processes of discursive sedimentation or rupture.

Comparative studies are also needed to understand how institutional cultures, party systems, and media environments shape the uptake or rejection of post-truth tropes. Particular attention should be given to discursive resilience: the ways in which legal reasoning, expert authority, and humanitarian frameworks can function as counterweights to epistemic distortion. Analysing when and how these forms of resilience succeed or fail offers critical insight into the mechanisms that sustain deliberative integrity. It is not only the content of political speech that shapes policy, but also the narrative infrastructures through which ideas gain legitimacy and institutional traction.

Addressing post-truth dynamics, however, requires moving beyond the identification of misinformation or the correction of distorted or decontextualised claims. It demands a closer examination of how meaning is constructed, authorised, and contested within institutional settings. As this report demonstrates, post-truth is not simply a breakdown of truth, but a restructuring of political meaning. Its power lies in its capacity to erode the normative architectures – legal, humanitarian, and technocratic– that have traditionally defined the boundaries of legitimate argument. Understanding how and when these architectures remain intact is essential to the defence of democratic policymaking. The typology and analytical approach developed in this study offer tools for that task.

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8. Glossary of terms

Migration politics:

Politics is the process of making government policies. In this regard, migration politics refers to the dynamic interplay of actors, interests, ideologies, and power relations involved in shaping policies and decisions related to migration at both domestic and international levels. It encompasses the processes through which political actors, including governments, political parties, advocacy groups, and international organizations, negotiate and contest issues such as immigration, asylum, border control, and migrant rights, etc. Migration politics involves not only the formulation of policies, but also problematization of migration issues in the broader political discourse, public opinion, and electoral dynamics that influence attitudes towards migration and migrants. These politics are influenced by a range of factors including economic interests, security concerns, cultural identities, historical legacies, geopolitical context, global migration trends, and public opinion.

Focusing event (critical juncture):

It is an occurrence or event that dramatically highlights the severity of a problem. In this sense, focusing events open policy windows. Focusing events may shift the balance of power in the political system, like it happened in many European countries throughout 2015 and 2016 electoral cycle, when migration became the number one political topic in the EU. Focusing events may change what is politically acceptable and/or unacceptable in a given policy and open up room for the consideration of (new) proposals that were previously out of bounds due to their restrictive or oppressive character. Normalization of push-backs can serve as a good example.

Post-truth tropes:

Post-truth tropes are utterances marked by distinct features of post-truth discourse, including a reliance on emotional appeal and personalized attacks, a tendency to relativize scientific knowledge, weakening of the information sphere and democratic institutions. They also reflect a shift in epistemic authority, positioning the public as the primary verifier of truth, while oscillating between a disregard for truth and its strategic colonization for political or ideological purposes

Storylines:

A storyline coherently binds arguments (claims, evidence and warrants) allowing us to navigate through complexities of discourse. It is “a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories in order to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena”. In this respect, story-lines have a very important function in discourse. They stabilize it by introducing at least some degree of logic; propose a plot, uniting and tying different aspects of a problem; propose evidence and reasons; and position subjects, objects and structures of the story (e.g. heroes, villains, referent objects – “damsels in distress”, or requisites). Story-lines may strengthen the status quo, reflected in political and epistemic orders which guide policy action, but they also may lead to emergence of new understandings and interpretations and consequently shift the mainstream political discourse. This may be caused by emergence of new evidence, powerful political actors, platforms and audiences, which balance the scale on what is e.g. “acceptable” and/or “truthful”.

Storyline imbued with post-truth:

Storylines that serve as vehicles for making post-truth tropes more visible, powerful, mainstream, and/or prominent. They can also contain truth claims, revealing their insidious nature: they ‘spoil’ the discourse, acting parasitically while simultaneously legitimizing it.

Arguments (internal structure):

In this study, our understanding of an argument is inspired by the Toulmin’s model of argumentation, which provides a framework for analyzing how arguments are internally structured. According to this model, an argument typically consists of a “claim”, either declarative or prescriptive, that represents the speaker’s main point (e.g., “we should stop providing welfare to migrants”). A claim is supported by “evidence” or grounds, such as data, examples, or observations (e.g., “they cost more in social benefits than they contribute”), which serve to justify the claim. The connection between the evidence and the claim is established through warrants, which serve as explicit or implicit underlying assumptions often drawing scientific, political, cultural or even ideological beliefs (e.g., “migrants harm our economy”). Warrants give

arguments their logical coherence and persuasive power, even when they are not directly stated. This model helps uncover the often hidden assumptions that shape public discourse and influence how arguments are received and evaluated.

Structuration:

Structuration allows to observe the prominence of a specific argument or claim within a discourse. It occurs when a particular claim becomes an obligatory reference point in discussions, even if its accuracy is disputed (e.g., “we cannot be certain all migrants are safe”). Once embedded, these claims influence policy narratives and may become perceived as “common sense”.

Institutionalisation:

Institutionalization occurs when post-truth moves from discourse into policy action, such as local restrictions targeting migrant communities based on unfounded fears. This process often involves observable elements of marginalization and/or the misuse of evidence to legitimize actions that are detached from informed policy-making and instead driven by false evidence, beliefs/convictions, ideological assumptions, and/or emotions.

Discourse coalition:

Discourse coalitions can be described as a loose alliance of actors who, despite differing motives, sustain and spread similar arguments, co-creating (post-truth) storylines. Even political groups that officially reject post-truth claims and tropes may inadvertently reinforce them by aligning with post-truth styled grammar, tactic and logic of argumentation. In this way, they can be unwittingly joining a discursive coalition that contributes to post-truth discourses.

Dominating discourses:

The underlying, mainstream and normatively accepted narrative(s) within a given debate (which can extend to a timeframe, critical juncture, context). They are an amalgamation of dominating storylines within a debate. There can be more than one dominating discourse in a debate or specific case context and timeframes, especially in polarized settings.

Post-truth scales (embeddedness in discourse and practice):

Storylines can be analysed in reference to three degrees of post-truth embeddedness (trivial, popular, or deep), which is reflective of how they translate into dominant public discourses and policy practice.

Trivial post-truth:

Trivial level of post-truth is characterised by relatively low significance for the quality of political discourse, it is superficial and unimportant in the scheme of things. Here, post-truth tropes which have a trivial level of embeddedness may cause disruption or even outrage within political discourses, wherein one political actor (member of parliament) or one political party uses a certain argument (e.g. “Migrants are not human, they are human-like”), yet the arguments themselves do not find proponents within a larger scope of ‘discourse coalitions’ (structuration) and do not become institutionalised as policy action. What is important to note here is that a post-truth trope which stays on the trivial level in one context and timeframe may find more resonance (supported by evidence and warrants) in another. Therefore, it is not the post-truth trope itself that can be considered ‘trivial’, but the lack of its institutionalisation — its normalization, sedimentation and broader reproduction within discourse.

Popular post-truth:

Popular post-truth refers to the propensity of certain post-truth imbued storylines to ‘stick’ within political discourses and get reproduced and shared amongst discourse coalitions. This is when structuration happens within the framework of argumentative discourse analysis. Popular post-truth tropes and arguments seep into storylines and become routinised and popularised by those who spread them; these “post-truth entrepreneurs” form discourse coalitions which reproduce certain arguments which may cut across party lines and ideological divisions. Yet, this level of post-truth still remains only in discourse and does not translate into policy action. We use the notion of ‘popular’ here as a proxy for populist post-truth, which thrives in a space of politicization of sensitive issues like migration, and where ideologically-driven polarization takes shape.

Deep post-truth:

Deep post-truth reflects a fuller or deeper embeddedness of post-truth tropes within discourse, to the point of its institutionalization (or high potential thereof) in policy action and practice. This happens not only when post-truth becomes normalised within political discourse, but when it becomes the basis or condition for policy action. Post-truth tropes become powerful and sedimented within discourse; their underlying normative assumptions become strong enough that evidence is not necessary, or its role is significantly diminished. Deep post-truth can be grasped in two ways: the first is the sheer intensity and frequency of post-truth tropes within certain storylines that 'jam' or 'flood' the discourses. The second is the ability of post-truth to colonize the discourses on truth, thus diminishing other (contesting) arguments and informing development of policies and policy actions. In this sense, post-truth becomes to some extent stabilized within discourse. These discourses thrive in conditions of fear, uncertainty, and heightened insecurity. This scale holds the potential for a reconstruction of societal understandings of truth (and the evidence thereof) on migration, asylum and borders; it is the most permeable to post-truth tropes.

9. Annex: Database of analysed parliamentary debates



Debate number	COUNTRY / ENTITY	DATE OF THE DEBATE (DD.MM.YY)	TITLE OF THE DEBATE (IN NATIONAL LANGUAGE)	TYPE (PLENARY/ COMMISSION)
1.	Italy	07.04.2011	<i>Sul tragico incidente occorso ieri al largo dell'isola di Lampedusa.</i>	plenary
2.	Italy	04.10.2013	<i>Informativa urgente del Governo sulla tragica vicenda del naufragio di una imbarcazione carica di migranti presso l'isola di Lampedusa.</i>	plenary
3.	Italy	22.04.2015	<i>Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo straordinario del 23 aprile 2015.</i>	plenary
4.	Italy	21.04.2017	<i>Discussione delle mozioni Brescia ed altri n. 1-01439, Palese ed altri n. 1-01603, Binetti ed altri n. 1-01606, Andrea Maestri ed altri n. 1-01611, Carnevali ed altri n. 1-01612 e Rondini ed altri n. 1-01613 relative al funzionamento dei cosiddetti centri hotspot per i migranti.</i>	plenary
continuation	Italy	16.05.2017	<i>Seguito della discussione delle mozioni Brescia ed altri n. 1-01439, Palese ed altri n. 1-01603, Binetti ed altri n. 1-01606, Andrea Maestri ed altri n. 1-01611, Carnevali, Alli ed altri n. 1-01612 e Rondini ed altri n. 1-01613 relative al funzionamento dei cosiddetti centri hotspot per i migranti.</i>	plenary
5.	Italy	27.06.2018	<i>Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri in vista del Consiglio europeo del 28 e 29 giugno 2018.</i>	plenary
6.	Italy	03.07.2019	<i>Intendimenti in merito al contrasto dell'immigrazione illegale e al rafforzamento delle misure di controllo dei confini nazionali, in particolare marittimi, anche alla luce della recente vicenda relativa alla nave Sea Watch 3 – n. 3-00842. Chiarimenti in relazione al divieto di ingresso, transito e sosta della nave Sea Watch 3 nelle acque territoriali italiane, recentemente disposto in base al decreto-legge n. 53 del 2019 – n. 3-00849. Dichiarazioni di voto - Doc. XVI, n. 15.</i>	plenary
7.	Italy	20.10.2021	<i>Comunicazioni del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri in vista della riunione del Consiglio europeo del 21 e 22 ottobre 2021.</i>	plenary
8.	Italy	17.03.2022	<i>Disegno di legge: Conversione in legge del decreto-legge 25 febbraio 2022, n. 14, recante disposizioni urgenti sulla crisi in Ucraina (A.C. 3491-A) (Seguito della discussione ed approvazione).</i>	plenary
9.	Italy	02.02.2023	<i>Discussione del disegno di legge: Conversione in legge del decreto-legge 2 gennaio 2023, n. 1, recante disposizioni urgenti per la gestione dei flussi migratori (A.C. 750-A).</i>	plenary
10.	Italy	27.11.2024	<i>Seguito della discussione del disegno di legge: Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 11 ottobre 2024, n. 145, recante disposizioni urgenti in materia di ingresso in Italia di lavoratori stranieri, di tutela e assistenza alle vittime di caporalato, di gestione dei flussi.</i>	plenary
11.	Poland	16.09.2015	<i>Informacja prezesa Rady Ministrów na temat kryzysu migracyjnego w Europie i jego reperkusji dla Polski.</i>	plenary
12.	Poland	09.02.2016	<i>Sprawozdanie Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej o poselskim projekcie uchwały w sprawie polityki imigracyjnej państwa polskiego na forum Unii Europejskiej</i>	plenary
13.	Poland	09.03.2016	<i>Sprawozdanie Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej o poselskich projektach uchwał w sprawie: - polityki imigracyjnej państwa</i>	plenary

			<i>polskiego na forum Unii Europejskiej, - polityki imigracyjnej Polski</i>	
14.	Poland	21.10.2016	<i>Pierwsze czytanie komisijnego projektu uchwały w sprawie propozycji ustanowienia unijnego korekcyjnego mechanizmu alokacji uchodźców oraz mechanizmu solidarności finansowej</i>	plenary
15.	Poland	02.12.2017	<i>Sprawozdanie Komisji Administracji i Spraw Wewnętrznych oraz Komisji do Spraw Unii Europejskiej o komisijnym projekcie uchwały w sprawie propozycji ustanowienia unijnego korekcyjnego mechanizmu alokacji uchodźców oraz mechanizmu solidarności finansowej</i>	plenary
16.	Poland	30.09.2021	<i>Rozpatrzenie wniosku Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w sprawie wyrażenia przez Sejm zgody na przedłużenie stanu wyjątkowego obowiązującego na obszarze części województwa podlaskiego oraz części województwa lubelskiego</i>	plenary
17.	Poland	09.11.2021	<i>Informacja rządu w sprawie sytuacji na granicy polsko-białoruskiej i podejmowanych działań</i>	plenary
18.	Poland	08.03.2022	<i>Pierwsze czytanie rządowego projektu ustawy o zmianie ustawy o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa oraz niektórych innych ustaw</i>	plenary
19.	Poland	28.11.2023	<i>Pierwsze czytanie poselskiego projektu uchwały w sprawie powołania Komisji Śledczej do zbadania legalności, prawidłowości oraz celowości działań, a także występowania nadużyć, zaniedbań i zaniechań w zakresie legalizacji pobytu cudzoziemców na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w okresie od dnia 1 stycznia 2019 r. do dnia 20 listopada 2023 r</i>	plenary
20.	Poland	22.05.2024	<i>Informacja Ministra Obrony Narodowej w sprawie stanu bezpieczeństwa Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej</i>	plenary
21.	Poland	26.06.2024	<i>Pierwsze czytanie projektu ustawy o zmianie niektórych ustaw w celu usprawnienia działań Sił Zbrojnych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, Policji oraz Straży Granicznej na wypadek zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa państwa</i>	plenary
22.	Poland	11.07.2024	<i>Pierwsze czytanie projektu ustawy o zmianie niektórych ustaw w celu usprawnienia działań Sił Zbrojnych RP, Policji oraz Straży Granicznej na wypadek zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa państwa</i>	plenary
23.	Austria	23.09.2015	<i>Die europäische und internationale Dimension der Flüchtlingskrise</i>	plenary
24.	Austria	11.11.2015	<i>Aktuelle Herausforderungen der Flüchtlingsfrage erfordern europäische Lösungen</i>	plenary
25.	Austria	27.01.2016	<i>Sicherheit statt Asylchaos</i>	plenary
26.	Austria	21.11.2018	<i>Nach Nein zu Migrationspakt – Bundeskanzler Kurz verspielt Österreichs diplomatische Rolle und Ansehen in der Welt</i>	plenary
27.	Austria	25.09.2019	<i>Effektiver EU-Außengrenzschutz als Fundament eines geordneten Asylwesens</i>	plenary
28.	Austria	22.09.2021	<i>Sicherheit für die Österreicher statt Kapitulation vor Asylbetrug!</i>	plenary

29.	Austria	21.09.2022	<i>Wohlstand und Sicherheit für Österreich statt EU-Sanktionen und Masseneinwanderung</i>	plenary
30.	Austria	01.03.2023	<i>Durchführung von Abschiebungen nach Afghanistan</i>	plenary
31.	Austria	15.05.2024	<i>EU-Wahnsinn stoppen – Festung Europa als Garant für Sicherheit, Wohlstand, Frieden und Freiheit</i>	plenary
32.	Austria	11.12.2024	<i>Asylbremse: Maßnahmen, die wirken</i>	plenary
33.	Germany	29.11.2012	<i>Die Menschenwürde von Flüchtlingen ist migrationspolitisch nicht relativierbar – Konsequenzen aus dem Urteil des Bundesverfassungsgerichts zum Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz ziehen</i>	plenary
34.	Germany	22.04.2015	<i>Flüchtlingskatastrophe im Mittelmeer</i>	plenary
35.	Germany	01.10.2015	<i>Erste Beratung des von den Fraktionen der CDU/CSU und SPD eingebrachten Entwurfs eines Asylverfahrensbeschleunigungsgesetzes</i>	plenary
36.	Germany	12.05.2016	<i>Aktuelle Entwicklungen beim EU-Türkei-Abkommen</i>	plenary
37.	Germany	01.02.2018	<i>Sicherung menschen- und grundrechtlicher Standards bei der Reform des Gemeinsamen Europäischen Asylsystems / Für eine offene, menschenrechtsbasierte und solidarische Asylpolitik der Europäischen Union</i>	plenary
38.	Germany	17.12.2020	<i>Für einen solidarischen und menschenrechtsbasierten Neuanfang in der Europäischen Flüchtlingspolitik / Schutz- und Menschenrechte im europäischen Asylsystem in den Mittelpunkt stellen</i>	plenary
39.	Germany	24.03.2021	<i>Menschenwürdige Unterbringung an den europäischen Außengrenzen und faire Asylverfahren sicherstellen</i>	plenary
40.	Germany	17.02.2022	<i>Europäische Asyl- und Migrationspolitik voranbringen – Aber nicht einseitig zulasten Deutschlands erkaufen / Solidarität mit den europäischen Partnern – Unterstützung für die Maßnahmen Polens, Ungarns und anderer europäischer Staaten zur Abwehr destabilisierender Migrationsbewegungen / Menschen- und Flüchtlingsrechte in der Europäischen Union und an der polnisch-belarussischen Grenze verteidigen</i>	plenary
41.	Germany	08.04.2022	<i>Aufnahme ukrainischer Kriegsflüchtlinge – Lückenlose und täuschungsfreie Registrierung sicherstellen – Kapazitäten für Kriegsflüchtlinge freisetzen</i>	plenary
42.	Germany	18.01.2024	<i>Zweite und dritte Beratung des von der Bundesregierung eingebrachten Entwurfs eines Gesetzes zur Verbesserung der Rückführung (Rückführungsverbesserungsgesetz)</i>	plenary
43.	Germany	18.10.2024	<i>Zweite und dritte Beratung des von den Fraktionen SPD, BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN und FDP eingebrachten Entwurfs eines Gesetzes zur Verbesserung der inneren Sicherheit und des Asylsystems</i>	plenary

44.	Germany	05.12.2024	<i>Kehrtwende in der Migrationspolitik jetzt einleiten – Maßnahmen zur sofortigen Beendigung der illegalen Einwanderungsströme treffen</i>	plenary
45.	European Parliament	4.4.2011	<i>EU response to the migration flows in North Africa and the Southern Mediterranean, in particular, in Lampedusa - Migration flows arising from instability: scope and role of EU foreign policy (debate)</i>	plenary
46.	European Parliament	09.10.2013	<i>EU and Member State measures to tackle the flow of refugees as a result of the conflict in Syria (debate)</i>	plenary
47.	European Parliament	25.11.2014	<i>Situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration (debate)</i>	plenary
48.	European Parliament	12.04.2016	<i>The situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration (debate)</i>	plenary
49.	European Parliament	15.01.2019	<i>Reform of the EU asylum and migration policy in light of the continued humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and Africa</i>	plenary
50.	European Parliament	12.02.2020	<i>Humanitarian situation of refugees at EU external borders (debate)</i>	plenary
51.	European Parliament	19.01.2021	<i>Humanitarian situation of refugees and migrants at the EU's external borders (debate)</i>	plenary
52.	European Parliament	18.10.2022	<i>Impact of Russian invasion of Ukraine on migration flows to the EU (debate)</i>	plenary
53.	European Parliament	10.04.2024	<i>Screening of third country nationals at the external borders - European Criminal Records Information System - Third Country Nationals - Common procedure for international protection in the Union - Establishing a return border procedure, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 - Asylum and migration management - Addressing situations of crisis and force majeure - Establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, for identifying an illegally staying third-country national or stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes (recast) - Union Resettlement Framework - Standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection - Standards for the reception of applicants for international protection (recast) (joint debate - Migration and Asylum package)</i>	plenary
54.	European Parliament	23.10.2024	<i>Managing migration in an effective and holistic way through fostering returns (debate)</i>	plenary
55.	Spain	16.09.2015	<i>Dictámenes de Comisiones sobre iniciativas legislativas. Proyecto de Ley de Presupuestos Generales del Estado para el año 2016.</i>	plenary
56.	Spain	29.08.2019	<i>Comparecencia de la vicepresidenta del Gobierno y ministra de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes e Igualdad, ante el Pleno de la Cámara, para informar sobre las actuaciones y medidas realizadas por el Gobierno en ayuda del rescate humanitario de más de 160 personas realizado por el Open</i>	plenary

			<i>Arms, así como sobre las medidas adoptadas por España y la Unión Europea para garantizar la obligación impuesta por el Derecho Internacional de rescatar vidas humanas en peligro en el mar.</i>	
57.	Spain	01.07.2021	<i>Comparecencia del señor secretario de Estado de Migraciones: Para informar de las líneas generales de actuación en el ámbito de sus competencias. A propuesta del Gobierno. Para que explique cómo va a abordar el Gobierno, en coordinación con todas las administraciones concernidas, la llegada de inmigrantes durante los meses de verano, en medio de la crisis del COVID-19, a las costas españolas o traspasando por la fuerza los puestos fronterizos de Ceuta y de Melilla. A petición del Grupo Parlamentario Popular en el Congreso. Para explicar las actuaciones adoptadas por su Secretaría de Estado para coordinar la respuesta del Gobierno ante la llegada de inmigración irregular durante los meses de verano. A petición del Grupo Parlamentario Popular en el Congreso. Para que dé explicaciones sobre la actual situación de crisis migratoria en Canarias y sobre las medidas que piensa adoptar su departamento en materia de control de la inmigración irregular. A petición del Grupo Parlamentario Ciudadanos. Para informar sobre el Programa Nacional de Reasentamiento de 2019 desarrollado en el año 2020, sus previsiones iniciales, sus efectos y ejecución, así como sobre la acogida de las 147 personas sirias que llegaron a España el día 17/12/2020 en el marco del Programa Nacional de Reasentamiento y de las previsiones de dicho programa del próximo año. A petición del Grupo Parlamentario VOX. Para dar cuenta de la acción del Gobierno ante la avalancha de más de seis mil inmigrantes irregulares que entraron ilegalmente a España a través de Ceuta el día 17/05/2021. A petición del Grupo Parlamentario VOX.</i>	<i>comission (Comisión de Trabajo, Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones)</i>
58.	Spain	09.10.2024	<i>Proposición de ley para una regularización extraordinaria para personas extranjeras en España. Debate en comisión entre 23/05/2024 hasta 13/06/2024</i>	<i>plenary and commission (Comisión de Trabajo, Economía Social, Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones)</i>
59.	Spain	13.06.2024	<i>Proposición de ley para una regularización extraordinaria para personas extranjeras en España.</i>	<i>plenary</i>
60.	Spain	23.07.2024	<i>Toma en consideración de proposiciones de ley. De los Grupos Parlamentarios Socialista, Plurinacional SUMAR y Mixto, de modificación de la Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social.</i>	<i>plenary</i>



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