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Title of Dissertation:

What Explains European Union Member State Behaviors toward the Responsibility Sharing
for People in Clear Need of International Protection?
Bargaining Power in the EU Refugee Regime

Source: eDiss Open Access of the State and University Library of Lower Saxony Göttingen
(SUB), Göttingen 2022.

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The EU faced unprecedented refugee flows in the crucial year 2015 as the result of the civil war in Syria started in 2011 and the following political destabilization in the Middle East countries. In particular, first entry countries—Italy and Greece [Spain to some extent]—faced the highest migration pressure between 2014 and mid-2015. Furthermore, transit countries—Hungary—were overwhelmed also by refugee arrivals in summer 2015 as the result of a new entry-channel namely the Western Balkan route. As a matter of consequence, EU member states met with strong varied behaviors whether to accept refugees or not at the national level. In particular, Germany decided to voluntarily accept refugees becoming the destination country with the highest migration pressure in late summer 2015.

In order to address the refugee issue at the European level, the EU Council adopted in September 2015 two Relocation Decisions following the measures included in the European Agenda on Migration proposed by the EU Commission in May 2015. The two Relocation Decisions' aim was the redistribution of refugees among the EU member states—assisting particularly Greece and Italy—based on the principle of responsibility sharing. As a matter of consequence, the EU member states behaviors regarding the principle of responsibility sharing included in the Relocation Decisions varied strongly. In this context, it is relevant to understand the behavior of the EU member states towards refugees at both national and European levels.

This thesis addresses the following two Research Questions (RQs) related to this debate:

RQ₁: What explains EU member state behaviors regarding the (non) acceptance of refugees at the national level?

RQ₂: What explains EU member state behaviors toward the responsibility sharing for people in clear need of international protection (PCNIP) at the EU-wide level?

This thesis answers the research questions using the theoretical paradigm of Liberal Intergovernmentalism (LI) based on state preferences, interstate bargaining power and institutional choice [this latter has not been included in the analysis as the result of the chosen time frame in the study and the ongoing CEAS reform process]. Methodologically, this thesis is designed through a comparative case study approach including in the analysis three EU member states namely Italy, Hungary and Germany.

The primary sources of data are the 39 in depth-interviews conducted with political domestic interests groups, economic and non-governmental ones as well as researchers, scholars and journalists in the field of asylum and migration in the case selected countries. The interviewed people are experts in this field and occupy high-up positions in the respective domestic

institutions. Furthermore, yearly reports published at both national and EU-wide levels, especially regarding the measurement of statistical indicators, EU and national institutions' press releases as well as policy briefs provide the secondary source of data.

The empirical results regarding RQ₁ show the following three patterns of acceptance of refugees at the national level: formal acceptance (Italy), non-acceptance (Hungary) and voluntary acceptance (Germany). The degree of acceptance is determined by the constellation of primary economic interests of domestic actors and secondary ideological ones. More specifically, those primary economic interests in the case selected countries—Italy, Hungary and Germany—are determined themselves by the demand for labor compared to the best alternatives that states have in order to satisfy it, the unemployment rate, as well as of ailing national security systems especially in the case of Italy.

Ideology represents the secondary source regarding the degree of acceptance of refugees at the national level. This led to two patterns of EU member state behaviors in ideological terms namely the pro-European ideology (Italy and Germany) and the nationalistic one (Hungary). Ideology is operationalized by the upholding of human rights, the degree of solidarity in the society as well as the compliance with national, European and international legislations and conventions regarding the right to provide asylum.

With regard to the RQ₂, this thesis shows the following two patterns of EU member state behaviors toward cooperation on the responsibility sharing for refugees at the EU level: cooperative (Italy and Germany) and non-cooperative (Hungary). They are explained in reference to the EU member states bargaining power—determined by the unilateral policies and the alternative coalitions—that they have during the negotiation process regarding the Relocation Scheme in order to contrast the migration pressure [this latter is operationalized through the number of first asylum application lodged in each of the countries].

In sum, this study provides a systematic and comprehensive bottom-up analysis through a rationalist lens in an undertheorized policy field, where research is needed.