

## Political action and inaction. Identity co-construction in the face of modern crises

Adrian TOADER<sup>1</sup>

*The purpose of this research is to examine how the topic of migration is viewed under the political lenses of the European Parliament, and how the identity of both the in-group (characterised by the European Community) and the out-groups (represented by Ukrainian and Syrian refugees) are negotiated in parliamentary discourse. The corpus comprises 20 follow-up interventions dealing with the refugee crisis (from 2015 to 2023). To address these aspects, the paper is based on a multidisciplinary approach rooted in fields such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and pragma-rhetoric. Looking at how collective identities are projected through pronominal references provides a better understanding of the plurality of voices that shape the process of identity formation. Based on the findings, the last part of the research will draw a comparison between how the identities of the in-group and out-group are discursively constructed and co-constructed and will draw attention to the subsequent strategic effects of group categorising.*

Keywords: *migration, identity, in-group, out-group, otherness, self*

### 1. Introduction

Since its establishment, the main purpose of the European Parliament was to safeguard the social, political, and economic prosperity of their citizens as well as of those from adhering countries and to establish an institution that would protect both the rights of EU and non-EU citizens. To tackle ongoing issues of major importance for the European community, the representatives of Member States meet regularly within the European Parliament, in forums made for “political deliberation, legislation, problem-solving and decision making” (Ilie 2010, 1).

A critical issue of transnational importance is represented by the uncontrolled waves of migration, mainly caused by ongoing military conflicts and economic instability in certain geographical regions. A growing number of communities have sought to obtain visas and to live a normal life within the

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<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, Romania, [toader.adrian@unitbv.ro](mailto:toader.adrian@unitbv.ro)

borders of European countries. From the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis to current events, such as Ukrainian civilians seeking shelter, all of these aspects are openly discussed within the European Parliament as all Member States need to reach an agreement on how to successfully manage an ever-growing number of migrants within their countries and how to offer support to both immigrants and European citizens in times of crisis.

Such political speeches are characterised by a shared feeling of unity and responsibility towards communities and groups that have been affected by various socio-political events of tragic dimensions. There are also voices that speak about the adverse effects of migration and of the subsequent economic toil, which could potentially fuel extremist views on the topic of migration. Some MEPs choose to talk about this matter from an individual standpoint, others as delegates of their countries. Moreover, MEPs can approach the subject from an ideological perspective or speak on behalf of a political group. As representatives of national and transnational parties, it can be argued that political figures hold power in swaying public opinion as, oftentimes, parliamentary discourse is under public scrutiny. Hence, “people make strategic inferences from these kinds of discourse and build mental models of ethnic situations” (van Dijk 1989, 202) when assessing and interpreting “the basic opinions about relevant minority groups” (*ibidem*) expressed in the European Parliament.

## **2. Theoretical and methodological frameworks**

### **2.1. A linguistic framework**

In recent years, researchers in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been particularly interested in approaching pressing social issues by analysing the power dynamics between various groups or factions from the standpoint of diverse socio-cultural, religious, political, or economic dimensions (Van Dijk 1993; Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Issues such as gender studies, racism, migration, and ideology were integrated within the field of CDA through the prism of such antagonistic categories as ‘us’ vs. ‘them’. In this regard, the analysis of the subsequent relations of power derived from social practices put forward the concept of *othering*. This novel methodological approach was mainly influenced by prior research in the field of sociology.

Prominent in this direction is the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al. 1978; 1979; 1982) which accounts for interpersonal relations established by individuals within socially constituted groups. To provide context, in their research, Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that individuals understand their surroundings through a

process of group categorising. In other words, human beings classify themselves on account of differences and similarities, i.e. age, race, ethnicity, political views. This is followed by an individual's mental response to self-identifying with various groups. The process of self-inclusion can be determined by a person's value system or can be attributed to a wide range of biological or contextual factors, i.e. individual preferences, deciding to support a political party, choosing your profession. Moreover, the process of self-inclusion can be pre-determined by, race, gender, age, ethnicity, etc. Lastly, group members will often protect their self-image as much as their collective identity. This, in turn, establishes relations of power between the in-group and the out-group as individuals will intentionally speak against or discredit other groups in the interest of protecting their collective affiliations. The theoretical directions set by the Social Identity Theory support the idea that people purposefully choose to be part of certain groups. Hence, the process of negotiating identity is primarily achieved within the dynamics of in-group and out-group interactions. Discrediting other categories to improve social standing proves that cognitive and social identities fulfil specific functions in the formation of identity.

Another highly influential study on the development of CDA was introduced by Sacks (1995). The researcher put forward the concept of *membership categories*, a term referring to how individuals make sense of the world by assessing and classifying human beings. People create and use social categories in everyday interactions as they "mobilize a range of discursive resources to design interactionally sensitive descriptions of themselves and others and this, in turn, positions them within specific categories" (Grad and Rojo 2008, 14). Otherwise stated, membership category refers to how identity is determined by well-established, socially-determined, clusters of categories. The acquired knowledge that speakers have about these categories, such as being a parent, a spouse, or a child, allows speakers to ascertain culturally acquired values, which shape their own identities. Concepts such as 'gender', 'family', or 'profession' are seen as ways of establishing inclusive as well as exclusive group identities as audiences can relate to speakers that make reference to identities from the groups that they jointly adhere to.

In CDA, *othering* has become a significant source of interest in political studies. Dervin defines the term as "an interdisciplinary notion that refers, amongst other things, to differentiating discourses that lead to moral and political judgment of superiority and inferiority between 'us' and 'them' and within groups." (Dervin 2015, 1). Applied to the field of political discourse, *othering* puts membership categories in opposition, investigating how this dichotomous relationship is perpetuated in discourse. By this, Tekin puts forward three constitutive elements of *othering*: "membership categories,

lexicalizations and the selective use of possessive pronouns” (2010, 211). The speakers make a “selective use of possessive lexical to accentuate better the positive traits attributed to the Self” (2010, 159) and use negative lexicals to define the opposing category. Along these lines, speakers can purposefully employ referential strategies (achieved through the use of plural pronouns) to create a discrepancy between the positive self-representation of the ‘we’ group and the negative predication of ‘other’ groups. Differently stated, “othering, more than often, involves the ascription of varying degrees of negativity to the out-groups” (Silverman 1988, 161).

Whether classified as membership categories or in and out groups, the above-mentioned theoretical directions define social identities as comprised of multiple facets. A consensus drawn from this analysis is that social identity is fluid (in the sense that human beings can often purposefully shift between social selves), learned, or acquired (through a mental process of assessing the outside world), and achieved dialogically (as individuals actively negotiate their public image). The theories bring arguments to support the idea that both the subject and the social selves should be accounted for when discussing identity. Analysing linguistic elements that form the dichotomous relation of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ is primarily achieved by using pronominal markers that further constitute dominant and subordinate group dynamics.

## **2.2. Research methodology**

The research aims to investigate the process of identity formation within the context of European Parliamentary discourse. This will be done by looking at how MEPs project their group identity in contrast with that of the out-group (the Syrian and Ukrainian minorities). To investigate group dynamics, the research will focus on pronominal instances that allow MEPs to highlight collective affiliations.

The data used for the present study comprise 20 follow-up interventions (audio-visual transcripts) dealing with the refugee crisis, delivered between 2015 and 2023, and publically available on the official website of the European Parliament. I have decided to look at follow-up interventions because they offer a comprehensive cross-cultural approach to a particular topic in which members of the European Parliament, belonging to different countries and political affiliations, can voice their arguments regarding the topic of the debate.

To conduct my research, I propose a multidisciplinary methodology. When dealing with the process of identity formation, particularly the dynamics between the in-group (contextualised as a European coalition of Member States) and the

out-group (viewed as the previously-mentioned minority groups), I focus on Critical Discourse Analysis and membership categorisation theory.

To analyse how collective identities are projected by way of pronouns and to speak about the potential effects of group categorising, I put forward a pragma-rhetorical approach. This allows me to add new analytical directions to my research by focusing on aspects such as the use of attitude markers, subjectivity, word choice, or figures of speech.

To discuss the potential effects of identity construction and the persuasive nature of parliamentary discourse, I also focus on rhetoric. This is mainly used to highlight affective language or pathos, often employed by speakers when talking about tragic events. The rhetorical, deliberative component of parliamentary discourse, on the one hand, and the pragmatic language use, on the other, provide a better examination of the process of parliamentary discourse by accounting for both the institutional and the communicative nature of its design (Fetzer 2013). The theoretical background allowed me to look at how the identity of both the in-groups and out-groups are constructed and co-constructed by Members of Parliament and to briefly comment on the dynamics between collective identities, mainly viewed as an 'us' and 'them' relation.

### 3. The European Union in the face of the refugee crises

In the current geopolitical climate, all countries belonging to the European Union dealt, to some extent, with the ever-growing phenomenon of unregulated migration. In recent years, political events and natural disasters have increased the flow of immigrants and created the need for strong and well-developed transnational policies needed to manage these economic and humanitarian crises occurring on European soil. One such event is represented by the ongoing Syrian war. From 2015 to date, about half of Syria's population has been displaced. As a result, millions of people sought political asylum in Europe. According to the United Nation's statistics, approximately 15 million people will need emergency aid in 2023<sup>2</sup>. A second refugee crisis occurred on European soil and was the result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, approximately 8 million people had been displaced from the country and more than 6 million refugees were recorded across Europe<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Data taken from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, accessed on 4.06.2023, online: <https://tinyurl.com/smykmr7d>

<sup>3</sup> Data taken from the Operational Data Portal. Ukraine Refugee Situation, accessed on 4.06.2023, online: <https://tinyurl.com/ytaxh4j7>

These dramatic episodes have accelerated the need for finding a common plan, proposed by the European Union, which would provide support for both the war victims and the European citizens. Among the important topics debated in the plenary were: establishing a holistic EU approach towards uncontrolled migration, creating safe and legal routes for the refugees, taking legal actions against the smuggling and trafficking of people, implementing new policies and legislation for refugees, implementing European visas and work permits for immigrants, cultural and social integration, finding asylum for refugees, or offering humanitarian aid for countries with a growing number of immigrants.

It goes without saying that the subject of the refugee crisis became a main talking point in the European Parliament. However, due to the complexity of the issue, political opinions often clash. Aside from the economic toil of providing asylum for the refugees, MEPs also need to address aspects such as cultural integration and assess potential threats that uncontrolled migration might generate for their own European constituency. As the paper will show, these particular socio-cultural and economic aspects influence the ways in which MEPs choose to negotiate the identity of the refugee groups.

#### **4. Projecting identities in European Parliamentary discourse**

In the practical part of the paper, I will draw data from various follow-ups, delivered in the European Parliament, and dealing with the topic of immigration and the refugee crises. Some methodological considerations should be made beforehand. Hence, it is important to note that the excerpts labelled SR bring into question the Syrian refugees while the abbreviation UR makes reference to the Ukrainian refugees.

##### **4.1. Projecting collective identities. 'Saviours' vs. 'victims'**

An important subject treated in parliamentary sittings relates to how Member States address matters that oversee the interests of minority groups as human rights are among the main priorities of the European Parliament. As such, the actions undertaken in this institution are key policies in the fight for democracy, freedom of speech, fair elections, and the rights of the oppressed<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from the official website of the European Parliament, online, accessed on 04.05.2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>

To this extent, group referencing allows MEPs to come across as multi-layered individuals whose duties and responsibilities extend beyond their immediate professional obligations. From this angle, they can depict the targeted audience in multiple ways and instil different sentiments in the receivers' minds.

(1) Let <b>us</b> be an example for the world. This is the challenge of <b>our</b> generation and <b>we</b> cannot be remembered as <b>the ones</b> who died while thousands suffered on <b>our</b> doorstep, or <b>we will</b> be the generation who failed.	
Date: 9 September 2015 MEP: MOGHERINI Federica (Italy) Political affiliation: European People's Party	SR

(2) The brave Ukrainians and the countries that host <b>them</b> need <b>us</b> and standing with <b>them</b> will be a test of solidarity and strength for the entire European Union.	
Date: 24 March 2022 MEP: SOLIZ PEREZ Susana (Spain) Political affiliation: Renew Europe Group	UR

In both examples, collective pronouns (“we”, “our”, and “us”) are used to speak on behalf of all parliamentarians as the MEPs assume the role of group representatives. The conveyed message is that of offering support to the victims of war, seeking shelter in Europe. This can be viewed as a call for action, or an attempt to mobilise other MEPs, and by extrapolation, Member States, to fulfil their EU obligations of protecting human rights.

In the first excerpt, collective responsibility is viewed as a historical event as the MEP cautions other members that inaction and lack of involvement can be detrimental to the public image of the in-group, suggestively described as a “generation who failed” to protect the principles and values of the European Union.

Advocating for a common cause is also done by expressing solidarity with the out-group, portrayed as victims of oppressive regimes. MEPs highlight the importance of approaching such issues as a united front and providing aid to the victims of war. In the examples above, the in-group can be viewed as saviours or problem-solvers while, contrastively, the out-group is shown as victims, in dire need of assistance. Such events of high political charge can be utilised, for pathetic effect and referenced, to advance a united course of action against a pressing issue with powerful repercussions for the European Community.

(3) Member States seem to agree on how many fish <b>we</b> can pick from our seas. <b>They</b> agree on how many plastic bags <b>we</b> can throw away, but when bodies of children are washing up on <b>our</b> shores and <b>we</b> still cannot agree how to deal with the refugees humanely, then everything else <b>we</b> do seems to <b>me</b> to be of little use (...) <b>We</b> like to say that <b>we</b> are a union of shared values, but <b>we</b> are not yet a Union of shared responsibility and that is <b>our</b> collective failure.	
Date: 5 October 2015 MEP: METSOLA Roberta (Malta) Political affiliation: Party of European Socialists and Democrats	SR

Projecting the image of the in-group is also achieved through the use of an emotionally laden language. Through the collective “we” references, the MEP criticises the skewed priorities of some Member States which are described as deeming fishing and environmental regulations much more important than protecting human lives. This example is used to highlight the in-group’s lack of involvement in finding common resolutions for an ongoing crisis.

Contrastively, the out-group is contextualised through affective language, as the MEP paints a vivid picture of the child victims “washing up” on European soil. In this case, the MEP infers that all Member States should oversee the issue of illegal smuggling and that of providing safe and legal routes for the Syrian refugees. Aside from building the image of the in-group in favourable terms, the individual speakers can also project their image positively, as they come across as preoccupied with humanitarian issues of transnational importance, which in turn, can help them establish rapport with both refugee groups and parts of their constituency.

(4) The atrocities committed by Russian and Belarusian soldiers are already widely documented. Murdered fleeing civilians in vehicles, women levelled by soldiers in front of their children and refugees deliberately shot in the legs (...) <b>all European countries should show solidarity and share the burden in helping Ukrainian refugees.</b>	
Date: 8 March 2022 MEP: OLEKAS Juozas (Lithuania) Political affiliation: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats	UR

Similarly, when approaching the Ukrainian refugee crisis, pathos is used to induce emotional pressure in other MEPs as the speaker describes the aftermath of the war, depicting the deaths of Ukrainian citizens, innocent bystanders, at the hands of Russian soldiers. Like in the previous example, the MEP becomes a spokesperson



or a representative of the out-group expressing solidarity and attempting to mobilise other Member States to offer aid to the out-group.

#### 4.2. ‘We’ as a group identity. ‘The European community’

There are cases where different political issues are forwarded under the guise of a collective transnational affiliation. MEPs can discursively project the identity of other groups that lack political power and voice their concerns within the European Parliament. Inclusive ‘we’ references are used to define both the in-group and out-group as part of a European community.

(5) Madam President, unlike with the previous refugee crisis, <b>we</b> now have a war on the European continent and Europeans from Ukraine are moving into other European countries for shelter. <b>We</b> have a simple European moral obligation to take care of <b>all of them, our fellow Europeans</b> .	
Date: 8 March 2022 MEP: KUBILUS Andrius (Lithuania) Political affiliation: European People’s Party	UR

Through ‘we’, the MEP prompts a sentiment of solidarity and from his colleagues. Speaking from this angle, he underlines the need for immediate action and mobilisation of all Member States.

(6) What can <b>we</b> do for <b>them</b> ? <b>They</b> need to go to the hospital, <b>they</b> need to have papers, <b>they</b> need to go to school and <b>they</b> need a job here in Europe. <b>We, Europe</b> , must treat <b>them</b> as our own because <b>they</b> are <b>ours, they are our European brothers</b> .	
Date: February 15 2023 MEP: ȘTEFĂNUȚĂ Nicolae (Romania) Political affiliation: Renew Europe Group	UR

In Examples 5 and 6, the Ukrainian refugees are explicitly viewed as part of a collective European identity, suggested through the expressions “our fellow Europeans/ our European brothers”. From a rhetorical standpoint, inclusive references can be used to sway public opinion in favour of people from the same continent, who share similar European ideals, beliefs and value systems with other EU Member States. Speaking on behalf of the in-group is also done so as to

underline the collective responsibility of a united Europe to offer aid to their European neighbours.

As seen in the examples above, collective pronouns ('We' and 'Our') are utilised when MEPs decide to speak on behalf of the entire European community (politicians and citizens alike). In parliamentary discourse, politicians continuously adapt to the 'wants' and 'needs' of the intended discursive target. Speaking in a professional capacity often introduces group values and policies, referenced in conjunction with the requirements and expectations of those that they represent in the plenum.

(7) The warm welcome to the Ukrainian refugees is Europe at its best. Colleagues, it is the cradle of human rights, a community of values and Europe should also be a safe haven for those Russians fleeing the brutal Putin regime and the soldiers who refuse to fight his dirty war. But let us also not forget the other migrants. Those who are still left dying on the borders of Europe pushed back and beaten, **because Europe will offer safety to all people equally, because that's who we are.**

Date: March 8, 2022

MEP: IN 'T VELD Sophia

Political affiliation: Renew Europe Group

UR

(8) "The first priority of EU policy should be the security and cohesion of **our** countries and the rights of **our** own citizens."

Date: March 11, 2015

MEP: ATKINSON Janice

Political affiliation: EFDD (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group)

SR

In both examples, collective referencing 'we' and 'our' are used to project the image of a broad European community. In example 7, appeals to ethos are prevalent, as the need to assist Ukrainian refugees is seen as a prerequisite of the European identity. The ambiguous "we" reference present here, can be viewed as an appeal to both the political faction and the constituency, to offer a safe haven to all those in need.

In Example 8, the MEP speaks on behalf of the European constituency, emphasising the need for policies and political decision-making that would primarily provide both "security" and "cohesion" for the European citizens. MEPs can focus on obtaining a favourable group image by addressing the topic under the

guise of overseeing the interest of their citizens. In this case, the MEP speaks on behalf of the European constituency, inferring that these matters should take precedence when dealing with refugee crises.

### 4.3. Emphasising qualities of the out-group

An interesting aspect that I came across when conducting research is that, unlike the Ukrainian refugee groups, no inclusive ‘we’ references were used to project the identity of the Syrian refugees. While a definitive answer for this aspect is difficult to infer, I would argue that there are some factors that might account for this matter. When it comes to the Ukrainian refugees, inclusive ‘we’ references might be generated by some aspects such as the proximity of the War (occurring in Europe), similar cultural and social values (particularly with Ex-Soviet and neighbouring countries), or shared religious beliefs and social practices. Instead, when it comes to the Syrian refugees, projecting a positive image for the in-group is done by underlining the economic benefits of using foreign workforce.

(9) That is why the Commission will present a holistic approach to the migration issue, because at the same time Europe is struggling with illegal immigration, it is struggling with the need for solidarity between European nations in tackling the issue of illegal migration and asylum seekers. Europe will need migration for <b>our</b> economy, for <b>our</b> sciences, for the structure of <b>our</b> societies.	
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Date: February 11, 2015 MEP: TIMMERMANS Frans (Netherlands) Political affiliation: Party of European Socialists	SR
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(10) Yes, in the short term <b>they</b> are a cost; but in the long term, let <b>us</b> be honest, <b>we</b> need <b>them</b> .	
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Date: January 13, 2015 MEP: CORAZZA BILDT Anna Maria (Italy) Political affiliation: European People’s Party	SR
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Here, an appeal to logos is prevalent as, in both examples, through explicit or inferred instances, the social integration of illegal immigrants is showcased as an economic necessity rather than a humanitarian imperative.

While the dichotomous ‘us’ and ‘them’ relationship is often adversarial in nature, we can see that in some cases, the identity of the in-group is projected favourably by the speaker. Examples 9 and 10 provide some instances where the

speakers involve two sides and choose to speak on behalf of the out-group. By presenting pressing issues that the group is facing, the MEP can represent its interests. Through a seemingly emphatic approach, the speakers' actions can positively resonate with the members of the out-group. Appeals to ethos are also prevalent as delegates direct their discourse towards other members of Parliament who hold the power to make changes and improve the livelihood of the out-group.

#### 4.4. Speaking against the out-group

Not all representations are supportive. When talking about the growing number of Syrian refugees flooding the European borders, some speakers choose to mention the potential threats to the well-being of the European Community. As such, the speaker "can create an image of the group he belongs to in a positive way and the other group in a negative way" (Håkansson 2012, 14). An ongoing threat to the stability of the EU is represented by the rise of terrorist threats. When it comes to dealing with issues such as migration, some MEPs will often talk about the adverse effects of cultural and social inclusion, particularly when dealing with Muslim immigrants, by mentioning the risks of increased terrorist activity that might occur from these policies. Speaking in favour of transnational security can generate adverse effects on the public image perception of a refugee group as it legitimises "new racist fears" (Ibrahim 2005, 169).

In the last two examples, both MEPs highlight the potential adverse effects of allowing Syrian refugees on European territory. Essentially, negative aspects such as the rise of terrorist threats, as well as regional and economic instability are associated with the out-group implicitly (Example 11), or explicitly (Example 12).

(11) Today it is 40 000, plus 120 000. How many more tomorrow? Over nine million people have left their homes in Syria. The people-traffickers are being enriched at the cost of human life. <b>All this is happening at a time of raised threats of terrorism.</b>	
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Date: September 8, 2015	SR
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MEP: VAN ORDEN Geoffrey (United Kingdom)	SR
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Political affiliation: European Conservatives and Reformists Group	SR
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(12) <b>Terrorism, uncontrolled migration, regional instability-</b> these are only some of the challenges we have in front of us.	
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Date: March 11, 2015	SR
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MEP: MOGHERINI Federica (Italy)	SR
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Political affiliation: European People's Party	SR
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In Example 11, the adversarial rhetoric seems to be directed towards human traffickers, who take advantage of the increasing number of Syrian refugees fleeing from their home country. While emphasising the issue of uncontrolled migration, the MEP also infers that, without proper vetting of the refugees, there is a chance of allowing people with terrorist ties, to enter Europe. Here, the out-group is showcased as both victims and potential threats, as the speaker's words highlight the importance of political reform and decision-making when dealing with this pressing issue.

In Example 12, through enumeration, the MEP puts forward some clear disadvantages generated by migration, i.e. terrorism, uncontrolled migration, and regional instability. All of these aspects are directly connected to the issue of migration and can be viewed as a negative ascription of the out-group. Unlike the Ukrainian refugee group, the image of the Syrian group is projected in a both positive and negative light as MEPs often position themselves to oversee the interests of the European Union, of their countries and their constituency.

## 5. Conclusions

The present analysis reveals that the speakers' institutional identity is mainly introduced through the use of collective pronouns. Assuming different positions in parliamentary discourse presupposes adaptability to the context and subjects approached in the sittings. MEPs use various rhetorical strategies when speaking in a representative capacity for the European institution and/or on behalf of subsequent members. Among these, I mention positive in-group attributions, appeals to solidarity and cooperation between Member States, reiterating core policies of the institutions and evoking emotional responses from other colleagues. In some cases, MEPs used group references to criticise the lack of political decisions and inaction when dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis. Under the guise of collective affiliations, MEPs underline common objectives, promote political cooperation or instil a sense of responsibility and solidarity in other MEPs. This, in turn, can be used to positively build up the image of the in-group. Moreover, inclusive and exclusive 'we'-references allow MEPs to speak on behalf of the European community, their constituency or as representatives of minority groups.

Through 'they' politicians project the identity of the refugee groups, often depicted as innocent victims, in dire need of support from the European community. Oftentimes, the identity of the out-group is projected through an emotionally-laden discourse. MEPs use *othering* to convey solidarity and offer support to the refugee groups, highlight positive attributes of the out-group, or identify potential threats of the out-group.

The data provided by the linguistic analysis of relational markers supports the existence of an opposition between countries belonging to the European Union and the refugee groups seeking political asylum on this territory. Throughout the parliamentary interventions, the use of collective pronouns often establishes a dichotomy between the European Community and the refugee groups. When it comes to the Syrian refugee crisis, *otherness* can also be seen as the result of dealing with an imminent threat that might affect the security and livelihood of a group of nations.

The constant flux of pronouns, present in parliamentary discourse, aligns with Weigand's (2010) concept of 'dialogic interaction' as identity is constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated in discourse. Individuals aim to obtain desired outcomes throughout their discursive performances and "exploit the flexibility of pronominal references to do this" (Bramley 2001, 259). In other words, the speakers' choices of projecting identities are determined by their "goals, purposes and desires in ever-changing surroundings" (Weigand 2015, 10). Employing a multiplicity of roles is achieved from different angles, allowing politicians to adapt to both the parliamentary settings and the expectations of the audience.

Arguably, some of these identities, projected in discourse, do not serve extra-linguistic aims and function chiefly in a referential capacity. In some cases, mainly when implicit or generic references are used, there is a certain degree of interpretability of the identities and of the rhetorical functions they entail. This is one of the main reasons for choosing pronouns, as they often represent an explicit means of contextualising identities. However, it is worth noting that interpreting the extra-linguistic aspects of pronominal identities can also be achieved from different perspectives since it frequently happens that the true intentions of the speaker are difficult to grasp.

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