

## EUROPEAN SOCIO-POLITICAL ELITES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRATION

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### Abstract

This paper analyses the attitudes of European socio-political elites towards migration, with a particular focus on their views on current migration movements that are partly common and partly divergent, depending on the interests that guide them and their societies. Regarding the attitudes of socio-political elites towards the migrant issue, it is observed that the creators of European policies mainly advocate for the 'externalisation' of control over the migration issue, primarily involving the relocation of migrant rights outside the EU borders and disregarding their human rights. There is also a noticeable trend of informal deviation from the principles of human rights and freedoms associated with the migration problem, approaching the perspectives of the so-called Visegrád Group, while fundamentally remaining on liberal positions in this domain. The subject of this paper is the relationship between European socio-political elites and current migrations, and the methods applied in the paper include scientific-descriptive, comparative, and content analysis. The aim of the paper is to analyse the most dominant attitudes and indicate the consequences of specific decisions made by individual European socio-political elites regarding migration.

**Key words:** socio-political elites, migration, Europe, EU, migration policy.

## ОДНОС ЕВРОПСКИХ ДРУШТВЕНО-ПОЛИТИЧКИХ ЕЛИТА ПРЕМА МИГРАЦИЈАМА

### Апстракт

У раду је анализиран однос европских друштвено-политичких елита према питању миграција, с посебним освртом на њихове ставове према актуелним миграционим кретањима који су једним делом заједнички, а другим различити, у зависности од интереса којима се руководе они и њихова друштва. У оквиру излагања о ставовима друштвено-политичких елита према мигрантском питању констатовано је да се креатори европских политика углавном залажу за „екстернализацију” контроле над мигрантским питањем, што се првенствено односи на

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измештање мигрантских права изван граница ЕУ и игнорисање њихових људских права. Такође је уочљив тренд неформалног одступања од начела људских права и слобода која су повезана са проблемом миграција и приближавања ставовима тзв. Вишеградске групе, али се принципијелно остаје на либералним ставовима у овом домену. Предмет истраживања овог рада је однос европских друштвено-политичких елита према актуелним миграцијама, а методе које се у раду примењују су научно дескриптивна анализа, компаративна анализа и анализа садржаја. Циљ рада је да се анализом најдоминантнијих ставова укаже на последице одређених одлука појединих европских друштвено-политичких елита према миграцијама.

**Кључне речи:** друштвено-политичке елите, миграције, Европа, ЕУ, миграциона политика.

### INTRODUCTION

The attitudes of socio-political elites towards migration primarily depend on their interests and ideological positions, including their party affiliations. Consequently, their response to the contemporary challenges and threats posed by migration generally aligns with the policies they advocate, with rare exceptions.

Due to the lack of consensus and a collective approach among European socio-political elites involved in decision-making regarding migration policy, the migrant issue often gets transferred to the supranational level of decision-making.

In an effort to find valid responses to the migration question that has shaken the entire European continent, European socio-political elites resort to various solutions, ranging from enhanced border control, adoption of migrant quotas, and the enactment of new legislation, such as the Asylum Law, aiming for complementary solutions.

### CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ELITES AND MIGRATION

The term 'elite' is commonly used to refer to individuals of the highest rank in a profession, society, or nation. The root of the word 'elite' comes from the Latin verb *eligere*, meaning to choose, from which the French noun *l'élite* is derived, meaning selected, exceptional, or the best. This term entered political theory only in the late 19th century (Botomor, 1967, as cited in Simeunović, 2009, p. 269).

According to Jacques Coenen-Huter, elites, in the singular form, refer to those who stand out as the best in their field of action compared to those who do not differ much from the masses. Therefore, this term is often synonymous with managerial elites. In the plural form, it encompasses individuals who hold prominent positions in different areas of ac-

tivity, without excluding their extraordinariness. In this case, it can refer to elites competing for the same goal or various specialised elites operating in different domains (Coenen-Huter, 2005, p. 11-12).

Thus, elites can consist of at least three diverse groups: a group whose predominance is based on “acquired qualifications and specific talents”, a group of traditional superiority that does not necessarily specialise in anything specific, and a group that serves as a “nursery” for diverse qualifications and talents (Nadel, 1956, p. 414, as cited in Scott, 1990).

Giovanni Busino suggests that this term refers to a minority in a given society and time, possessing privileges and prestige derived from natural or acquired qualities valued in society (Busino, 1992, p. 4). He specifically emphasises that a small circle of this elite holds political power (Busino, 1992, p. 55). In this sense, socio-political elites can be defined as a type of elite that makes key decisions for a society from positions of power and the greatest social influence.

When it comes to the conceptual definition of migration, one of the definitions provided by the EU states that it represents “the movement of persons, either across an international border (international migration) or within a state (internal migration), for a period of at least one year, irrespective of the causes (voluntary and/or involuntary) and the means (regular and/or irregular) used” (European Commission, n.d.). Additionally, it is essential to mention the definition by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which views migration as “the movement of persons away from their habitual place of residence, either across an international border or within a state” (IOM, n.d.).

Pieter Kok defined migration in 1999 as “the movement of people from one habitual place of residence to another at some distance” (Kok, 1999, p. 19). However, not all population movements can be called migrations. Migrations are not the same as settlements. Migration movements can be individual and/or temporary phenomena, while settlements are “more massive and inherently long-term” (Vukotić, 2016, p. 10).

Dragan Simeunović argues that migrations are a repetitive process because they tend to renew, continue, and complete themselves if they are artificially interrupted (Simeunović, 2015, p.10).

One of the key elements of almost every migration movement consists of the following five elements: “space, flow, duration in time, residence or domicile, and the individual’s activities in the new space, as well as the various consequences of these activities” (Jugović, 2020, pp. 110-111).

The current migrant crisis that has shaken the European continent is often, and mostly incorrectly, associated with refugee migrations.

Specifically, refugee migrations should be seen as the emigration of migrants to the first safe or secure country, rather than the crossing of

an entire continent by migrants trying to reach their desired destination. Germany and Sweden are the most common European countries of origin for this category of individuals. When we consider that these migration flows are primarily driven by Europe's need for low-skilled workers, it can be concluded that the current migration movements from the Middle East and Africa to Europe are difficult to predominantly categorise as refugee migrations.

In the past two years, the wave of refugee migrations from war-affected Ukraine has mostly spilled over to neighbouring countries, such as Russia, Poland, and Germany, with some of the important reasons for choosing some of these countries being the religious and cultural affinity between refugees and the local population.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data from November 2022, since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, over eight million refugees have immigrated to neighbouring countries, with the largest number finding refuge in Russia (nearly three million), as well as in Western European countries like Poland (around 1.5 million) and Germany (over one million) (*Od februara osam miliona*, 2022).

Contemporary migration movements pose a challenge not only to the destination countries and particularly to transit states (Gligorić, 2019, p. 494) but also to the international community as a whole. In this regard, it can be said that today's migrations as global and local phenomena are subject to various ideological interpretations and inconsistent political responses (Jugović, 2020, p. 111), with socio-political elites leading the way.

#### *SOCIO-POLITICAL ELITES AND MIGRATION MOVEMENTS TOWARDS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES*

European history, among other things, speaks of uprooted people who fought for survival, mass migrating from one country or continent to another aware of the dangers that could befall them on their journey, particularly the possibility of being 'swallowed up' by the sea while attempting to move to a more favourable place for a better life. What has fuelled mass migrations within and from Europe for centuries, and especially what drove them during the past century (Glynn, 2016, as cited in Gatrell, 2020, p. 2), can be attributed to common reasons for migration, such as fleeing poverty, wars, diseases, and the general desire for a better life.

However, numerous migrations to Europe have also taken place, often on a larger scale. The intensity and magnitude of these migrations have usually been proportionate to Europe's economic prosperity and the impoverishment of other parts of the world, to which the political and economic elites of certain European countries, labelled as 'colonial powers', have contributed significantly.

Today, as well as in earlier years, the responsibility for the large number of migrants and their direction towards European countries lies in the decisions of individual socio-political elites, namely strategic decision-makers. It could be said that their responsibility, in addition to causing migration prompted by wars and internal conflicts, i.e., refugee migrations, also lies in allowing mass migration movements. If these movements are not 'touched upon' or controlled, they could lead to eventual catastrophic political and economic stagnation, affecting the development of a range of countries as a consequence. Moreover, the decisions of political elites significantly influence the way of life and the success of the integration for migrants, particularly for the category of mostly impoverished individuals who flee from a lack of prospects and poverty towards a better, more prosperous life.

European socio-political elites have not yet reached a consensus on migration and asylum issues, although there is agreement regarding shifting responsibilities for deterring refugees to other countries. For example, Turkey is requested to keep Syrian refugees, while Libya is asked to stop and ideally deport migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, policy makers in Europe advocate for the 'externalisation' of control, in the context of transferring the rights of migrants outside European borders and 'ignoring' the human rights of this category of individuals. In this regard, there is increasing criticism of the 'outdated' 1951 Refugee Convention, and there are more frequent proposals to initiate a debate on immigration based on the "state's right to control its borders" (Holbrook, 2015, as cited in Gatrell, 2020, p. 12).

The political elites of many European countries, preoccupied with directing migration movements, often fail to realise that they are losing their country's most valuable social capital – young (educated) people. The longer the mass departure of young individuals from their homelands continues, the more difficult it will be for these countries to implement necessary reforms, and they will increasingly need highly educated young people, as well as skilled, not just low-skilled, workers.

In addition to all of the above, a significant proportion of irregular migrants make up the migrant population in migration channels. This category of individuals generally guarantees cheap labour for the countries they migrate to because "due to the fear of job loss and deportation, they accept any job offered to them" (Marković, 2018, p. 218). This often refers to so-called '3D jobs'<sup>1</sup>, which are performed not only by irregular migrants but also by low-skilled workers (*ibid.*).

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<sup>1</sup> '3D' is an acronym referring to dangerous, dirty, and demeaning/demanding jobs;

Furthermore, it is necessary to mention migrants who perform jobs for which they are overqualified, which often leads to ‘status frustration’<sup>2</sup>. Greece, with around 60%, and Italy, with over 40% of employed immigrants who are overqualified for the job they perform, are among the leading countries in this category of migrants (OECD/European Union, 2015, pp. 116-117, as cited in Marković, 2018, p. 219).

In the history of post-war Europe, opportunistic migrations were central. West Germany was at the forefront, signing bilateral agreements with Italy, Turkey, and Yugoslavia to engage guest workers. Those who took advantage of this opportunity were grateful for the chance to earn money for a better life and support their families (Miller, 2012, p. 570, as cited in Gatrell, 2020, p. 5).

When it comes to European socio-political elites as creators of migration policies, the origins of their design can be traced back to a five-year programme that began with the conclusions of the European Council Summit in Tampere in 1999 (2000-2005), which marked the beginning of EU migration policy. This programme guarantees “absolute freedom of movement within the territory of the European Union for all its citizens and for all immigrants who legally reside in this area” (Šantić & Obradović, 2016, p. 125). Subsequently, the Hague Program (2005-2010) followed in 2004, which relates to ten EU priorities. Within this programme, among other things, the establishment of Frontex (FRONTEX/European Border and Coast Guard Agency) was proposed, and later founded with the aim of integrating and standardising border control and surveillance operations. Additionally, the Global Approach to Migration (GAMM) was developed as a comprehensive framework for external migration policy, with the external dimension of EU migration policy focusing on dialogue and cooperation with third countries linked by shared interests (Šantić & Obradović, 2016: 126). After this, the Stockholm Program (2010-2014) followed in 2009, within which certain priorities were differentiated, including the intensification of cooperation among member states. These mentioned programmes point to the “central role of the EU in articulating migration policy” (Dragić, 2016, pp. 115-118).

In addition to the mentioned programmes, there is another one, the so-called post-Stockholm Program, referred to as a ‘political orphan’ that nobody wanted to adopt as their own, and it was adopted in 2014 at the Council of Europe summit (Parkers, 2015, p. 3, as cited in Dragić, 2016, p. 118).

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<sup>2</sup> These are jobs that are below the level of one's acquired qualifications (high level of formal education). This leads to what is known as status discord or status frustration, which is associated with precariat (Standing, 2011, p. 10, as cited in Marković, 2018, p. 219);

When it comes to the human rights of migrants, it is important to mention the actions of the Global Migration Group, which advocates for the respect of basic rights for all migrants, “regardless of their migration status” (GMC, as cited in Radojković, 2017, pp. 40-41), which include:

the right to life, liberty, and security of person, freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, and the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution; the right to freedom from discrimination based on race, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, or other status; the right to protection from abuse and exploitation, freedom from slavery and servitude, and freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; the right to a fair trial and access to justice; the right to protection of economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to health, an adequate standard of living, social security, adequate housing, education, and fair and favorable working conditions; and other human rights guaranteed by international human rights instruments to which the state has acceded, as well as customary international law.

(GMC, as cited in Radojković, 2017, pp. 40-41)

All these rights of migrants fall within the realm of proclaimed and widely adopted human rights. However, for these rights to be applied in practice, it is necessary for the legal systems of countries that advocate for the respect of migrants' human rights to provide effective access to justice, which is not the case in a significant number of European countries.

In this regard, the European Commission often issues reminders of European regulations that indicate that absolute human rights and freedoms cannot be subject to limitations, even in extraordinary circumstances such as the migrant crisis (Dimovski, 2021b, p. 1065).

As for addressing the issue of a large number of migrants in individual countries, Article 80 of the Lisbon Treaty is particularly important, as it relates to the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibilities among EU member states. On the other hand, the much-praised Dublin Agreement has proven to be ineffective as it creates “disproportionate pressure on member states that are primarily affected, mostly in Northern Europe” (Fratzke, 2015, as cited in Dragić, 2016, p. 120). Requests for asylum of individuals relocated under the Dublin Regulation are often not considered or they are “prevented from accessing the procedure for determining refugee status” (Lalić, 2009, p. 763, as cited in Dragić, 2016, p. 120).

It is particularly concerning that EU member states generally do not adhere to measures agreed at the EU level, but are more inclined towards ‘individual reactions’ to the migrant crisis. If this trend continues, the quality of EU legislation implementation would be “jeopardized, and the political role of the Union marginalized over time” (Dragić, 2016, p. 122).

During the migrant crisis, in 2016, the European Commission released a document in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Organiza-

tion for Economic Cooperation and Development, presenting statistical data on the ‘recruitment’ of migrant workers in Europe (Recruiting Immigrant Workers: Europe). In this regard, it is stated that after the economic crisis of 2008, there was a decrease in the inflow of corresponding, mainly highly skilled migrant workers. The research showed that during the migrant crisis, the EU accounted for “31% of the total number of highly educated migrants worldwide, while in North America, it was almost twice as high (57%)” (OECD/EU, 2016, as cited in Grečić, 2019, p. 81). This indicates that migrants in the EU during that period were ‘less educated’ than those in the US.

The Schengen Agreement of 1985, as well as later legal instruments related to it, were designed to facilitate intra-European migration, and thus freedom of movement became the “cornerstone of European cooperation” (Rochau, 1965, as cited in Gatrell, 2020, p. 7). In this regard, Peter Gatrell notes that freedom of movement has always been conditional, as “national self-interest meant that ‘safes’ were made available to those states that wanted to ‘control’ migration within the EU, especially the arrival of third-country nationals” (Gatrell, 2020, p. 12).

Although prior to the current migrant crisis, political elites in EU countries strongly advocated for the implementation of the Schengen border management regime, after 2015, it was precisely those European countries that spoke most about this regime that were the first to start implementing processes to protect their state borders, including the ‘militarisation of state borders’. Justifications for maintaining this type of engagement of border police and military units for border protection by European socio-political elites include the current wave of refugees from Ukraine as a consequence of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

It could be said that contemporary migrations have become a kind of battleground, a source of bitter disputes among nationalist and liberal political leaders, as well as a source of disharmony within the EU (Gatrell, 2020, p. 14). This is confirmed by the “resistance of long-time residents who become strangers in their own homelands” (Laqueur, 2007, as cited in Gatrell, 2020, p. 14), and previous decades have shown that not all new immigrants are willing to adapt and integrate into the community, at least not to the extent that suits European societies.

As an example of a positive attitude of the host population towards the migrant population, it is necessary to emphasise the Republic of Serbia, which, despite being predominantly Christian, has maintained a positive and fair approach towards migrants, regardless of their predominantly Islamic faith.

This is supported by the fact that our citizens have experienced migration as a major human catastrophe, and research shows that people tend to behave with more solidarity in conditions of significant disasters (Cvetković et al., 2018).



*THE RESPONSE OF SELECTED SOCIO-POLITICAL ELITES  
TO CHALLENGES AND THREATS CAUSED BY MIGRATION  
IN EUROPE*

The relationship between migration and freedom of movement is closely intertwined, and disruptions of this connection occur, among other factors, through the construction of barriers or walls. It could be argued that walls are actually a “constant of international relations” (Vallet & David, 2012, p. 111, as cited in Živojinović, 2018, p. 21), dating back to the construction of the Great Wall of China, Hadrian’s and Antonine Walls, as well as the Roman Limes, and continuing through medieval fortifications, to contemporary forms of separating interest spheres, states, or opposing blocs (Živojinović, 2018, p. 21).

As Hannah Arendt suggests, city walls and national borders have almost always served the purpose of delimiting and demarcating a space within which people can move freely, leading to the conclusion that freedom remains “spatially limited” (Arendt, 1991: 238, as cited in Živojinović, 2018, p. 22).

This ‘restriction’ is also present in contemporary developments as a consequence of the migration crisis, particularly in the stances of certain global political power players.

For populist leaders, migration control is far less important than creating the illusion of its effectiveness. The renowned German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, is credited with developing the thesis that states should voluntarily open their borders to foreigners if their intentions are peaceful. However, contemporary states are now increasing border control with “heightened vigilance” (Cohen, 2019, pp. 201-202).

The two dominant and opposing viewpoints among representatives of socio-political elites regarding the resolution of the migration crisis, which were most pronounced within the EU from the outbreak of the crisis until 2021, are Angela Merkel’s position and Orbán’s ‘vision’. Merkel’s stance emphasised “respecting international humanitarian obligations” (OSCE, 2016, pp. 5-6) and opposing borders and walls, rejecting any “upper limits on the number of refugees that Europe should admit”. One of Merkel’s appeals was to replace illegality with legality, which clashed with Orbán’s view that saw the refugee crisis as a “mass invasion”. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán predicted an increase in the number of refugees in 2015, the majority of whom were “raised in another religion and radically different culture”, which contradicted the EU’s identity that, according to him, is “rooted in Christianity” (*ibid.*).

Orbán’s vision remains unchanged to this day, as he continues to advocate for the revival of Christian identity in opposition to liberalism. Regarding former Chancellor Merkel, after her withdrawal from the political scene, she has been criticised for a lack of vision, and her name has been associated with the catchphrase ‘EU crisis manager’ (Adler, 2021).

In addition to the aforementioned European viewpoints on migration, it is significant to mention the perspective of a political leader from the East, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, who noted that the “European melting pot<sup>3</sup>” assimilates newcomers with interruptions and heating, but is incapable of “cooking” all the growing migration flows. The reflection of this is seen in politics through the emergence of ‘multi-culturalism’, which rejects integration through assimilation (Nikifor, 2014, p. 190-191).

Undoubtedly, there are differences in approaches to addressing contemporary migration issues between Western and Eastern European countries, as well as those in the north and south of the continent, manifested through the responses of European socio-political elites to pressing problems related to migratory movements.

Following the outbreak of the migrant crisis, some European borders were closed, leading to the phenomenon of ‘fragmentation’ within the European Union, and the need for ‘restructuring’ the European continent. The countries that were the first to respond to the influx of migrants by erecting fences were Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, and Croatia. The decisions were made by their socio-political elites.

However, despite the perceived effectiveness of these methods, it is clear that the construction of fences and the provision of ‘palliative humanitarian aid’ cannot solve uncontrolled migrations. Instead, efforts should be directed towards improving living and working conditions in poorer countries worldwide, especially those from which migrants predominantly come to Western European countries (Štavljanin, 2021).

The measures and decisions taken by representatives of political elites in individual countries undoubtedly influence the situation on the ground regarding migration. An illustrative example is the agreement reached in 2016 during a meeting of police chiefs in Zagreb, which included the closure of the Greek-Macedonian border. However, even after the agreement was reached, thousands of people were stranded between the borders due to insufficient cooperation among the states in accepting and directing migrants (*Zbrka oko izbeglica*, 2016).

Although European migration policy imposes a quota system on each member state, specifying the number of migrants to be accepted, some EU member states, particularly those in the Visegrád Group – Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia – have decided, based on the views of their political representatives, to disregard the “EU bureaucrats’ regulations” in Brussels. This demonstrates to all European political leaders and not just the elites of the EU that they consider EU membership not necessarily linked to certain responsibilities (Simeunović, 2022, p. 434).

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘melting pot’ refers to the homogenisation of a heterogeneous society, primarily used in the context of immigrant assimilation in the United States;

The lack of consensus among EU member states and other European countries regarding migration issues, as well as the erection of fences, has had a domino effect – as one country made its borders more impenetrable, each subsequent country introduced stricter controls (Perišić, 2018, p. 96). This was particularly evident in the cases of Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia.

Despite Germany's commitment in September 2015 to voluntarily settle 500,000 refugees from Turkey annually, along with other EU member states as envisioned in the European Stability Initiative (ESI) plan (Štiglmajer, 2013, as cited in OSCE, 2016, p. 6), it succumbed to the renewal and fortification of borders, as well as the increase in the number of border authorities, especially along the Austrian border.

Regarding the results of implementing EU obligations in establishing a “voluntary solidarity mechanism” concerning the relocation of migrants to other countries, four European countries – Italy, Greece, Malta, and Cyprus – condemned the mentioned system in mid-November 2022, highlighting that as “countries of first entry into Europe”, they bear the greatest burden in establishing the mentioned mechanism (*Četiri mediteranske zemlje*, 2022).

Since this measure has not proven particularly effective, the European Commission introduced a new strategy in mid-2021 – the Voluntary Return Strategy for migrants who do not have the right to stay in the EU. Of those individuals who do not have the right to stay in the EU, only less than 30% voluntarily return to their country of origin (*EK predstavio novu strategiju*, 2021).

According to the estimation of the European Parliament Research Service, the costs of voluntary returns are significantly more favourable than the costs of returns from transit countries. Specifically, the cost of return from transit countries amounts to 2,500 euros per person, while the cost of forced return is 3,414 euros, and the funding for voluntary return is only 560 euros per person. Additionally, the agreement provides for a more flexible solidarity mechanism among member states, allowing those member states that do not want to accept asylum seekers to take on the “obligation of return” for irregular migrants (*EK predstavio novu strategiju*, 2021).

In the field of migration policy, it is essential to mention the concept of ‘communitarisation’<sup>4</sup>, which pertains to visas, asylum, immigration, and the international movement of people, and which can significantly reduce the powers of national parliaments of EU member states through: (1) loss of decision-making authority (powers transferred to the Council or, if necessary, the European Parliament under the supervision of the Court of Justice); (2) loss of legislative initiative (after five years, it

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<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <https://glosbe.com/en/en/communitarization>;

becomes the prerogative of the European Commission); (3) loss of prevention power (elimination of the unanimity decision-making procedure of the Council, in line with the new Article 67 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union); and (4) weakening of control powers, which can become indirect, etc. In light of these powers, some EU countries seek to “transfer” migration control to third countries (Lavenex, 2006, p. 329, as cited in Azoulai & Vries, 2014, pp. 60-61). In fact, by distancing themselves from EU policies, individual member states bypass cooperation with EU institutions, although they should, in principle, turn to official Brussels first (Azoulai & Vries, 2014, pp. 60-61). Cooperation among EU countries in the field of migration changed in the mid-1990s, opening up numerous opportunities for stronger lobbying by non-governmental organisations in this area (Azoulai & Vries, 2014, pp. 60-61). Virginie Guiraudon states that such distancing by individual member states from EU policies could increase the involvement of populist-leaning NGOs (Guiraudon, 2001, as cited in Azoulai & Vries, 2014, p. 61).

Significant steps towards implementing the Migration and Asylum Pact in 2021 are reflected in the adoption of EU Regulation 2021/2303, which established the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) in January 2022<sup>5</sup>, as well as in the EU Strategy on Voluntary Return and Reintegration and the implementation of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion. Prior to this, the leading EU institutions demonstrated their commitment to achieving the Migration and Asylum Pact by presenting their legislative priorities for 2021 in a Joint Declaration in December 2020, along with Joint Conclusions on policy goals and priorities for the 2020-2024 period (Gregori, 2022, p. 8).

The repercussions of the current situation in the Balkans regarding migration can be viewed through several perspectives, with two situations being particularly prominent. The first is the period following the outbreak of the migrant crisis, characterised by a mostly welcoming attitude towards migrants and the formulation of an ‘open-door’ policy. The second is the period between mid-2016 and the present day, during which the attitude towards migrants has shifted towards scepticism and fear (Gregori, 2022, p. 7).

After German Chancellor Angela Merkel launched the famous slogan “We can do it” (*DE* Wir schaffen das) in late August 2015, it encouraged some European countries on the Western Balkan route to facilitate the easier movement of asylum seekers towards Germany by providing them with bus and/or train transport. Among these countries, Macedonia and Serbia took the lead (Coco, 2017, p. 296, as cited in Perišić, 2018, p. 94).

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<sup>5</sup> The mentioned agency replaced the existing European Asylum Support Office (EASO);

Austria's decision to limit the admission of asylum seekers in early 2016 triggered a chain reaction in the region, resulting in stricter control of migrants at entry points and leading to their returns or refusals of admission. This primarily affected those of Afghan origin. As a consequence, Greece engaged in diplomatic activities to address the issue of 'migrant accumulation' at the border with Macedonia. On the other hand, Germany expressed dissatisfaction with the measures implemented by Austria, as Austrian authorities had 'allowed' too many migrants to pass through towards Germany.

In Germany, Angela Merkel's stance on migration led to a decline in her popularity, despite the fact that Germany was the only European country to reap significant economic and other benefits from migration movements in the early years of the migrant crisis. On the other hand, the once staunch stance of Viktor Orbán, which was criticised by the majority of European political elites, became tacitly accepted by the European majority after 2019, enhancing Orbán's 'prestige' both domestically and internationally.

Regarding the situation in the Western Balkan region in terms of migration, the views of its political leaders and European political leaders align in some aspects, but differ in others. While some perceive migration issues as an "institutional-political verification of security risks" (Smajić, 2021), as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina immediately after the outbreak of the migrant crisis, with discussions continuing in the country throughout 2020 regarding the "legal deportation of over 9,500 irregular migrants from countries not in conflict zones" (Smajić, 2021), others strive to ensure the respect for the basic rights of migrants, as is the case in our country.

In the current circumstances regarding migration movements towards Europe, it is important to mention the wave of refugees from the East, specifically from Ukraine and Russia, which was triggered by the conflict between these two countries in February 2022. There are differences between the migrants comprising these two waves, not only in terms of those coming from the Middle East and Africa being immigrants while those coming from Ukraine are refugees but also in terms of their religious and cultural structure. While migrants from the Middle East and Africa are predominantly of the Islamic faith, those coming from Ukraine are Christians, mainly Catholics. The growing resistance in EU countries to the large influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa undoubtedly stems from the fact that Muslim migrants traditionally face difficulties in integrating into European societies, even in countries where they have been present for a long time, such as the United Kingdom, France, or Belgium. On the other hand, refugees from Ukraine already share key European values with members of the societies they migrate to. Overall, this influences the decision-making process of European political elites, as reflected in the documents regarding EU migration policy.

This suggests that socio-political elites should take into account not only the rational but also the irrational effects of the decisions they make, particularly regarding religious, racial, and ethnic dimensions, as they have a significant impact on social cohesion and stability. Furthermore, contemporary socio-political elites need to be held accountable for their actions through diverse democratic mechanisms, as their decisions affect an increasing number of people, including those who are not citizens of the countries they lead.

### *CONCLUSION*

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that European socio-political elites have partially shared and partially divergent views on migration. In both cases, they are guided by the economic and political interests of their countries, or the EU if their states are its members. There is a noticeable deviation from the political principles proclaimed by these societies regarding human rights and freedoms when it comes to migration. The main reasons for this can be identified as financial, cultural, and religious in nature. A significant justification for this divergence among European socio-political elites lies in the evident slow and insufficient integration of migrants into European societies, particularly those of the Islamic faith, who constitute a vast majority of migrants arriving in Europe in the past decade. This is also demonstrated by the more positive attitude of European political elites towards refugees from Ukraine, who are of Christian faith and culturally relatively close to the European societies they flee to.

The significance of financial reasons for the distancing of European socio-political elites from proclaimed principles is evident in the greater degree of deviation among poorer European countries, at least when it comes to adopting official political positions. In wealthier European states, the formal stance of their socio-political elites remains close to the proclaimed democratic principles regarding migration and the treatment of migrants. However, precisely these societies witness a significant political rise of the right-wing and xenophobia as a reaction to such stances of their political elites, best exemplified by the case of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Despite all of this, it can be concluded that European countries, especially EU member states, remain committed not only declaratively but also fundamentally to the principles and values of human rights and freedoms that have been, and continue to be the political banner of those societies. They have affirmed this commitment in many ways, including adopting appropriate decisions concerning xenophobia even before the intensification of migration flows in 2015 (Dimovski, 2021a, p. 740). In fact, it can be said that over time, due to pragmatic reasons, there has

been a certain correction of these attitudes, with elites from wealthy European societies looking to the nationally efficient migration policies of the Visegrád Group countries for guidance. This is evidenced by the new regulations adopted by the EU concerning migration, which fully preserve the spirit of the principles related to human rights and freedoms in the domain of migration policy, while allowing for certain deviations from them in practice. Undoubtedly, this reflects the views of European socio-political elites, both when it comes to norm-setting and the implementation of migration policy.

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## ОДНОС ЕВРОПСКИХ ДРУШТВЕНО-ПОЛИТИЧКИХ ЕЛИТА ПРЕМА МИГРАЦИЈАМА

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### Резиме

Иако европске друштвено-политичке елите углавном немају усаглашен став према мигрантској политици, оно што им је заједничко јесте да се оне углавном руководе економским и политичким интересима својих земаља, те неретко и идеолошким опредељењима политичких партија које представљају. Такође, да се констатовати да су све значајнија одступања од принципа прокламованих од стране европских друштвено-политичких елита на плану људских права и слобода која се доводе у везу са миграцијама, те да је степен тих одступања већи код сиромашнијих европских земаља.

Ауторка је у раду понудила одговоре појединих друштвено-политичких елита на изазове и претње узроковане миграцијама у Европи. Као два доминантна става супротстављена су становишта Меркелове и Орбана, која указују на несумњиво постојање великих разлика у одговорима на актуелна мигрантска питања између носилаца политичке власти у Европи и самој ЕУ, као и на јачање тенденције окретања европских друштвено-политичких елита својим националним интересима, што је у потпуности на трагу Орбанових ставова.

На крају рада нуде се и поједине препоруке на плану супротстављања безбедносним изазовима и претњама које носе савремене миграције ка Европи, а које се тичу одговорнијег приступа европских друштвено-политичких елита према миграцијама и миграционим токовима.