

The political vision of Europe during the ‘refugee crisis’: missing common ground for integration

Marie Wolf and Marinus Ossewaarde

Department of Public Administration, University of Twente, Enschede, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article analyses imaginaries of political decision makers of the European Union in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’ and interprets them according to theories of European integration – neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism. Speeches, interviews, statements and press releases of the 28 heads of state and government and two Commissioners are analysed through a qualitative content analysis. The aim of the article is to derive prospects for European integration from the imaginaries. We found that the European imaginaries expressed by the largest group of heads of state and government remain blurred without clarification which position is taken on European integration, while the imaginaries expressed by the Commissioners are mainly characterised by support of further integration. Our interpretation of the European imaginaries suggests that the prospects for further integration remain limited according to neofunctionalism, but are higher following liberal intergovernmentalism. In policy fields that are directly related to the management of the crisis further cooperation can be expected.

KEYWORDS

European integration;
European imaginaries;
neofunctionalism; liberal
intergovernmentalism;
refugee crisis

Introduction

As a response to the large refugee influx to Europe in 2015 and 2016, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, political decision makers have extensively discussed their perspectives and opinions on the European Union (EU) in the media. A debate on European identity and wider understandings of the EU was initiated. The High Representative of the European Union Mogherini (2016) explained in the European Parliament the ‘refugee crisis puts the European identity to the test’. In this article, decision makers’ statements in the context of the ‘refugee crisis’ are grasped through the conceptual lens of ‘imaginary’. Thereby, the analysis of the politicians’ broader background understandings of the EU, which shape their practices and decisions at EU level, is enabled. These European imaginaries serve as new insights for European integration theory. The concept of imaginary has been widely applied in various contexts, such as social governance, climate change, the biofuel sector and institutional design of stem cell banking (Dobbernack 2010; Levy and Spicer 2013; Ponte and Birch 2014; Stephens,

CONTACT Marinus Ossewaarde  m.r.ossewaarde@utwente.nl

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Atkinson, and Glasner 2013), but, thus far, has not been used to make sense of political debates on European integration. In this article, the concept of 'European imaginaries' is developed based on the work of Charles Taylor (2002, 2004). It contrasts previous conceptualisations of European imaginaries such as the one by Keith (2013), in the sense that it does not focus on European values but on the individual's (in this article, individual politician's) understanding of the EU. We apply theories of European integration for interpreting European imaginaries that have been expressed during the 'refugee crisis'. By focussing on this alleged crisis, we seek to broaden the ongoing debates on European integration that have organized around themes of the Eurozone crisis (e.g. Falkner 2016; Ioannou, Leblond, and Niemann 2015; Menon 2014; Tosun, Wetzel, and Zapryanova 2014).

Our research question is formulated as: Which prospects for European integration can be derived from the imaginaries of political decision makers expressed in the context of the 'refugee crisis'? We structure our analysis according to two sub-questions, that is (1) Which imaginaries have been expressed by political decision makers in the European Union? and (2) Which prospects for European integration can be derived from these imaginaries? We first provide an overview of the different European imaginaries that political decision makers have expressed in the context of the 'refugee crisis'. Then we apply theories of European integration to derive prospects from these imaginaries. Our interpretation of the European imaginaries is based on key theoretical understandings of European integration theory, neofunctionalism (NF) and liberal intergovernmentalism (LI). Although the two theories of European integration may no longer be the only theories of European integration, they nevertheless remain key reference points (Ioannou, Leblond, and Niemann 2015).

The concept of European imaginary

The European imaginary expressed by a person is dynamic but more consistent than short-term perspectives and opinions. Therefore, the concept offers the analysis of long-term strategies of political decision makers, which shape the EU and its future development. Key contributions on imaginaries have been written by Anderson (1983), Taylor (2002, 2004) and Castoriadis (1987). For Castoriadis an imaginary is the central worldview of a particular group but for Anderson imaginaries can spread across groups, especially across borders of nation-states (Anderson 1983; Strauss 2006). Due to deep integration processes in the EU today, the spreading of imaginaries across national borders is anticipated and Anderson's concept appropriate to apply in our own analysis. Taylor built on Anderson's work and extended it. For Taylor (2004, 23) imaginaries are 'ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations'. Consequently, imaginaries are descriptive as well as evaluative of their social surroundings and their processes. He argues that a range of social imaginaries exists at the same time while being shared among different groups or societies (Levy and Spicer 2013). Taylor sees imaginaries as communicated via images, stories and legends (Taylor 2002). Imaginaries can be understood as the background understandings of society. Therefore, by analysing imaginaries the background understanding of the society, that is, how individuals envision the EU, can be revealed.

It is important to stress that our analysis only touches on a limited part of the imaginaries, which are very complex since they comprise 'that largely unstructured and inarticulate

understanding of our whole situation' (Taylor 2004, 25). Our analysis of imaginaries reveals underlying perceptions and framings of society and not actual developments of reality (Stephens, Atkinson, and Glasner 2013). However, previous theoretical discussions have pointed at the impact of imaginaries on influencing actual (political) developments (Dobbernack 2010; Levy and Spicer 2013; Ponte and Birch 2014; Stephens, Atkinson, and Glasner 2013). Taylor (2002, 107) explains 'If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that the practice largely carries the understanding.' Accordingly, imaginaries of political decision makers can serve as important insights since the imaginaries reveal what expectations and long-term aims the decision makers pursue regarding the EU. In our analysis, imaginaries regarding the development of the EU are approached with a scheme applied in public opinion investigations. Public opinion on the EU can be distinguished into static and dynamic support for the EU as well as into refusal of European integration overall (anti-integration). Dynamic support stands for the demand of further European integration towards an ever closer union. Static support means that the EU is supported as it is now, but no further integration is endorsed. Anti-integration stands for the perception that integration already went too far (Rose and Borz 2016). Accordingly, the following three ideal types of European imaginaries are developed. The imaginary of dynamic support reflecting support for further integration, the imaginary of static support, which stands for the support of the EU's status quo and the imaginary of anti-integration, which entails the refusal of European integration.

In this study, it is assumed that the European imaginaries of political decision makers translate into prospects of European integration in the following way: The European imaginary reveals which strategies the political decision-maker pursues at the European level as the imaginary illustrates which underlying assumptions about the EU the political decision-maker shares. The European imaginary shows which policy directions the decision-maker will support by his vote and power in the EU, i.e. support for decisions in favour of integration, in favour of the status quo or decisions against further integration. Hence, the concept of European imaginary enables a deeper understanding of interests at the European level shaping European integration. In the following, it is elaborated how, applying NF and LI, this process takes place. Following NF, three different types of spill-over which foster integration can be differentiated: functional, political and cultivated spill-over (Niemann and Ioannou 2015). Considering the mechanism of functional spill-over, it can be expected that if the majority of the European imaginaries of the national and supranational decision makers reflect dynamic support for the EU, they will more likely implement political decisions supporting further integration and competence transfer to the EU level. This prospect of European integration also holds when applying the mechanism of political spill-over. It can be assumed that if the imaginaries of the national decision makers, as representatives of the governmental elites, mainly show dynamic support for the EU, this could reflect a political spill-over and be the result of a gradual learning process. Additionally, cultivated spill-over refers to the process that European institutions themselves promote supranationalism to benefit from the integration process. Correspondingly, it can be expected that if the imaginaries of the Commissioners reflect dynamic support for the EU, the prospects of European integration increase as they will foster cultivated spill-over.

According to LI, the imaginaries of the national heads of state and government are decisive for the future development of the EU since they hold the bargaining power in the European Council about competence shifts to the EU and the EU's institutional design (Moravcsik 1993).

Consequently, the European imaginaries of representatives of the European institutions are not attributed great impact. As bargaining between Member States with diverging national preferences can present an obstacle to further European integration (Tosun, Wetzel, and Zapryanova 2014), diverging European imaginaries expressed by national decision makers can hamper further integration. It is argued that in the interstate bargaining the national decision makers engage to achieve results in their own interest, i.e. they pursue to shape the outcome of the negotiations according to their European imaginaries. The states with relative bargaining power dominate and the states with less bargaining power only receive side-payments (Moravcsik 2008). In our analysis, levels of bargaining power are distinguished by using the classification of Member States into net payers and recipients as net recipients have to fear losing substantial payments, if the net payers threaten to cut down their contribution to the European budget during international negotiations.¹ A similar dependency became apparent during the Euro crisis between solvent and debtor countries, where solvent countries especially Germany had high and debtor countries low bargaining power (Fabbrini 2016; Schimmelfennig 2015). Accordingly, the imaginaries of national decision makers with greater bargaining power are more decisive for the further development of the EU than the ones of the countries with lower bargaining power.

In sum, imaginaries can be conceptualised as background understandings of society (Taylor 2002, 2004). A concept of European imaginaries with three ideal types is proposed: dynamic support, static support and anti-integration. They capture which broader understanding key political decision makers have of the EU. Theories of European integration do not explicitly refer to these imaginaries. However, as outlined above their lines of argumentation can be used to interpret the European imaginaries of political decision makers and to derive prospects of European integration from them. Following NF, the imaginaries of the two Commissioners are important for further integration. In contrast, following LI, especially the imaginaries of heads of state and government with great bargaining power are decisive for the European integration process.

Methods

In our analysis, imaginaries of important political decision makers in the EU were studied. As important decision makers the heads of state or government of the Member States as well as representatives of the European Commission were chosen. Scholars have discovered that the main 'trouble-shooting' during the economic and financial crisis was performed by Member States within the European Council (Falkner 2016). As our study was also conducted in a crisis context, the imaginaries of the Member States' representatives in the European Council were studied. These are for most Member States the imaginaries of the heads of government. Only in the cases of France, Lithuania and Romania, the head of state is the representative in the European Council (European Union 2017). Therefore, for France, Lithuania and Romania the imaginaries of the heads of state and for the remaining Member States the imaginaries of the heads of government were analysed. It has also been found that solutions of the immediate crisis management of the European Council were later transformed into standard EU procedures (with the Commission as 'a motor of legislation') and that the Commission in some cases even prevented spillback during crises (Falkner 2016, 230). Consequently, imaginaries of the European Commission as important supranational decision makers of the EU in crisis settings were included in our case. For the European

Commission, we selected Commissioners who are concerned with the management of the 'refugee crisis' since they represent the Commission's position during the 'refugee crisis'. Thus, the imaginary expressed by Dimitris Avramopoulos as the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship as well as the imaginary expressed by Jean-Claude Juncker as the Commission President were included.

We decided to analyse statements and positions of the decision makers. Previous works of other scholars also used interviews and media data for analysing imaginaries (Levy and Spicer 2013; Stephens, Atkinson, and Glasner 2013). We have collected political speeches and interviews published in newspapers as well as quotes in newspaper articles and press releases using Google search. For each decision-maker, we have selected documents that refer to the 'refugee crisis' and preferably to the EU as well. Only direct quotes and statements have been considered to capture literal statements of the decision makers. The number of documents included varies for the decision makers as for some extensive interviews and speeches were accessible and for others only direct quotes in newspaper articles. Therefore, the number of sources was increased for a decision-maker when only little information was provided by the first documents, i.e. only few direct quotes with a link to the refugee crisis and the EU. Furthermore, only documents in English were considered for the analysis to enable a comparison based on one language. 56 documents of the 145 under observation were retrieved from official government websites and official websites of the EU directly. The remaining 89 of the 145 documents were retrieved from websites of newspapers, television broadcasters or news agencies. There was no selection based on the type of media source to find sufficient direct quotes of every decision-maker. Still, it is important to consider that the media do not transmit neutral information but show information biases. However, Korthagen (2015) found that the biases to report increasingly negative news, which are dramatized and fragmented, are not as strong in the media attention for governing officials as for unofficial actors. Therefore, it is assumed that the sources offer a sufficient overview of the imaginaries expressed by the heads of state and government and Commissioners as they are governing officials, especially as only direct quotes were included in the analysis. The time span for the data was set from September 2015 until April 2016. If the decision-maker in office changed during this period, the decision-maker who was in office longer during the time span September 2015 – April 2016 was chosen. The time setting since September 2015 was set according to the specific date of Aylan Kurdi's death on the 2nd of September 2015 which led to a shift in public perception of the migrant influx in Europe (El-Enany 2016; Finch 2015). Since this date public attention for the refugee influx increased substantially in Europe and the pressure for European decision makers to react likewise. Therefore, in this study it is argued that the date marks the beginning of the public discussion on European identity triggered by the 'refugee crisis'. Due to the EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016, the number of refugees crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece each day dropped from 853 per day in March 2016 to 137 in April 2016 (European Commission 2016a). As these numbers illustrate, the pressure on European decision makers to react fell significantly from March to April 2016. Therefore, the period from September 2015 to April 2016 was chosen as the period with the highest public attention for the 'refugee crisis' and the greatest political pressure for European decision makers to react.

We have opted to apply the method of qualitative content analysis. This method enables us to make an in-depth analysis of statements so that we can identify and analyse the imaginaries. Following Hsieh and Shannon's classification of three different approaches to content

**Table 1.** Coding Scheme – European Imaginaries.

Category	Code	Coding rule	Example phrase
Dynamic support	New EU measure supported	A new EU measure (which inhibits further cooperation) is supported or proposed	'This is why, today, the Commission is also proposing a permanent relocation mechanism, which will allow us to deal with crisis situations more swiftly in the future.' (Juncker 2015, 4)
	Dynamic European crisis management	European crisis management explicitly in connection with new measures is referred to or more EU involvement in crisis management is demanded	'The logic of national sovereignty cannot prevail over joint European rules when it comes to the refugee problem' (Ekathimerini 2016)
	Further integration	Further integration is explicitly supported	'Faced with these challenges, I am convinced that if we do not move ahead with integration, we shall stop or slip back' (European Parliament 2015)
Static support	Preserve status quo	The EU as it is now or components such as Schengen are mentioned as worth to be preserved	'Preserving Schengen is not only in the interest of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, but also countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands.' (B92 Media 2016)
	Static European crisis management	European crisis management is referred to or demanded (but not in connection with any new measure)	'Fortunately, we are not alone. We are working together with other countries. We are a part of the EU's response.' (Løkke Rasmussen 2015, 3)
	Threat to the EU	The crisis and its consequences are referred to as a threat or challenge to the EU	'Everything which is now taking place before our eyes threatens to have explosive consequences for the whole of Europe' (Traynor 2015)
Anti-integration	Criticism of EU	The EU, EU institutions or (proposed) EU measures are directly criticised	'The fact that Brussels tolerates and promotes a culture of breaching treaties. The Maastricht criteria, Schengen, Dublin – nothing applies any longer.' (Orbán 2016)
	Border control	National border protection and closure of internal EU borders are referred to as necessary means	'We must also step up controls at our borders massively' (Rettman 2016)
	National threat	The crisis and its consequences are referred to as a threat or challenge to the own nation state	'We will not expose our countries to the devastating pressure of millions that would come.' (Withnall 2015)

analysis (2005), we decided to use a directed content analysis. By using directed content analysis, existing theory can be validated and conceptually extended. We do not attempt to capture every detail and aspect of the decision makers' imaginaries, but rather focus on key messages and tendencies. We have predetermined a coding scheme to answer the first sub-question (Table 1). The main categories of this scheme are derived from the research of Rose and Borz (2016) on public opinion of European citizens. The three categories – dynamic support, static support and anti-integration – resemble in some ways the three ideal types of European imaginaries that we have constructed. After coding all documents, we have determined to what extent the different categories of the imaginaries are present in decision makers' statements. It was gauged individually, which category (or categories) prevailed in their statements by asking the following questions: Are all categories present in the statements? Is one category explicitly stressed or do the statements contradict themselves? If we found no prevailing category, the imaginaries remained blurred and not assignable. It must be emphasized that we were not interested in any possible development of imaginaries in the given time frame. As the time frame of our analysis is short, we expected the imaginaries not to change fundamentally from September 2015 until April 2016.

Analysis

The European imaginaries of political decision makers

The heads of state and government differ in their overall support for the EU with imaginaries ranging from vast dynamic support to overall negativity towards the EU (Table 2). This partially wide difference can be illustrated by comparing the two contradicting visions of the EU by Renzi (Italy; dynamic support) and Orbán (Hungary; anti-integration). Renzi (2016, 1) demands a 'Europe not as the sum of national self-interest', while Orbán (2016, 3) sees the EU as 'made of the totality of national interests'. Furthermore, it is remarkable that for the largest group of heads of state and government no clear prevailing imaginary is found in the light of the extensive statements they made on the EU. To interpret this observation, further research on the development and influences of imaginaries is necessary. Likewise, five heads of state and government only referred very few times to the EU. Hence, it is argued that a significant share of the national heads of state and government does not clarify how they see the EU and its further development. The two second largest groups of heads of state and government expressed (1) imaginaries clearly supporting further integration and (2) imaginaries supporting the EU as it is now. Muscat (2015, 9), for example, illustrates his static support as follows:

Europe is not one, it is a union of 28 different voices. It is a choir and not a single singer. That's fine. It's what we are. It's not a huge drawback, and I don't think it should be like America.

The third largest group stated European imaginaries remaining in-between static support and anti-integration. In our observation, it stands out that only two national heads of state and government express refusal of European integration overall.

It is found that both Commissioners support the EU and further integration, while also addressing criticism of the EU. Juncker emphasises the need of further European integration extensively (dynamic support), while Avramopoulos only proposes new measures and ways of cooperating in the EU without demanding further integration explicitly (dynamic/static support). Juncker (2016, 4) declares: 'there is not enough Union in the European Union and



Table 2. Prevailing European imaginaries of the national heads of state and government.

Prevailing Imaginary	Dynamic support	Dynamic/ Static support	Static support	Static support/ Anti-integration	Anti-integration
Head of State and Government	Michel (BE), Anastasiades (CY), Merkel (DE), Röivas (EE), Hollande (FR), Renzi (IT)	Bettel (LU), Costa (PT)	Orešković (HR), Kenny (IE), Straujuma (LV), Muscat (MT), Rutte (NL), Čerar (SI)	Borisov (BG), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Sipilä (FI), Szydło (PL), Cameron (UK)	Orbán (HU), Fico (SK)

Note: Blurred imaginary: Faymann (AT), Sobotka (CZ), Tsipras (EL), Rajoy (ES), Grybauskaitė (LT), Iohannis (RO), Löfven (SE).

not enough Europe in the European Union, with Member States thinking that the refugee crisis can be solved by working alone, as nations', while Avramopolous formulates his wish to preserve the status quo of the EU as follows: 'This crisis [...] is a crash test for the European institutions in their relations with member states. We must not, through this crisis, follow the road of re-nationalisation.' (Macdonald 2015, 2). Comparing the imaginaries of the national decision makers and the European Commission, the imaginaries of the heads of state and government show a great range of perspectives on the EU, while the imaginaries of the two Commissioners are relatively similar and remain in the realm of support for the EU. The two second largest groups of heads of state and government support further integration of the EU (dynamic support) and the EU as it is now (static support). These groups reflect equal support for the EU as the two Commissioners express.

To answer the first sub-question, the analysis shows that the imaginaries expressed by political decision makers vary from prevailing support of further integration to refusal of integration overall. The largest groups of decision makers, including heads of state and government and the Commissioners, either express no clear imaginary on European integration or support further integration. But the imaginaries of a large share of national decision makers also only reflect the support of the status quo of the EU or refusal of European integration. Overall, it is found that of all national and supranational decision makers, only two clearly express the opinion that European integration already went too far with nearly no support for the EU at all.

Interestingly, there are many shared tendencies in the imaginaries of both the heads of state and government and the Commissioners (Table 3). The tendencies are partly even shared between heads of state and government expressing different European imaginaries. Remarkably, it is found that more than two-thirds of the heads of state and government demand a common European instead of a national solution for the 'refugee crisis'. Löfven (2016, Sweden), for example, explains: 'We have to find a way to cooperate, finally it is about shared responsibility. If we share responsibility we can handle it.' Furthermore, it stands out that more than two-thirds of the national decision makers explain that the 'refugee crisis' depicts a threat or challenge to the EU, which can question its status quo, while only about half of them express concerns about the crisis threatening the own nation state. It is found that more heads of state and government demand to preserve the Schengen area and joint external border control than national border control. Straujuma (2015, Latvia) puts it as follows: 'Our interest is to protect [the] Schengen area and to avoid the formation of new divisions of Europe'. Only in the case of mandatory quota, more heads of state and government refuse European cooperation than support it. Hence, mandatory quota appears to be a measure not widely supported and a special case as it entails greater competence transfer to the EU than the other measures. It is argued that these shared tendencies illustrate that the tendencies of supporting the EU's status quo or even supporting new cooperation in fields related to the immediate crisis prevail over national perspectives in the imaginaries of the heads of state and government. It is found that the imaginaries of the Commissioners also include many tendencies apparent in the imaginaries of the heads of state and government.

**Table 3.** Shared tendencies in the imaginaries of the decision makers.

Shared tendencies in the imaginaries	Expressed by the following heads of state and government	Expressed by the following Commissioners
Common European solution needed	Faymann (AT), Michel (BE), Boriso (BG), Anastasiades (CY), Sobotka (CZ), Merkel (DE), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Tsipras (EL), Rajoy (ES), Hollande (FR), Orešković (HR), Kenny (IE), Renzi (IT), Grybauskaitė (LT), Muscat (MT), Rutte (NL), Costa (PT), Iohannis (RO), Löfven (SE), Cerar (SI) (20)	Juncker, Avramopoulos
Crisis seen as a threat to the EU	Faymann (AT), Bettel (BE), Boriso (BG), Sobotka (CZ), Merkel (DE), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Röivas (EE), Rajoy (ES), Tsipras (EL), Hollande (FR), Orbán (HU), Grybauskaitė (LT), Muscat (MT), Rutte (NL), Costa (PT), Iohannis (RO), Löfven (SE), Cerar (SI), Fico (SK), Cameron (UK) (20)	Juncker, Avramopoulos
Crisis seen as a threat to the own nation state	Faymann (AT), Anastasiades (CY), Sobotka (CZ), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Tsipras (EL), Sipilä (FI), Orešković (HR), Orbán (HU), Szydło (PL), Löfven (SE), Cerar (SI), Fico (SK), Cameron (UK) (13)	–
Demand to preserve Schengen	Faymann (AT), Michel (BE), Boriso (BG), Sobotka (CZ), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Tsipras (EL), Rajoy (ES), Hollande (FR), Orešković (HR), Orbán (HU), Kenny (IE), Renzi (IT), Bettel (LU), Straujuma (LV), Szydło (PL), Iohannis (RO), Löfven (SE) (17)	Juncker, Avramopoulos
Demand of national border control	Faymann (AT), Boriso (BG), Sobotka (CZ), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Orešković (HR), Orbán (HU), Iohannis (RO), Löfven (SE), Cerar (SI) (9)	–
Demand of joint protection of the external EU borders	Michel (BE), Anastasiades (CY), Sobotka (CZ), Merkel (DE), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Röivas (EE), Hollande (FR), Kenny (IE), Grybauskaitė (LT), Bettel (LU), Straujuma (LV), Szydło (PL), Cerar (SI), Fico (SK) (14)	Juncker, Avramopoulos
Refusal of mandatory quota	Sobotka (CZ), Röivas (EE), Orešković (HR), Orbán (HU), Grybauskaitė (LT), Szydło (PL), Iohannis (RO), Fico (SK) (8)	–
Support of mandatory quota	Faymann (AT), Merkel (DE), Tsipras (EL), Kenny (IE), Renzi (IT), Löfven (SE) (6)	Juncker, Avramopoulos

The limited prospects of spill-over effects

According to NF, European integration is driven by spill-over effects. The majority of imaginaries of the national and supranational decision makers show the wish to preserve the open Schengen area and the perception that the 'refugee crisis' threatens or at least challenges the EU. Strikingly, a vast majority of the imaginaries also includes the support of a common European solution to tackle the crisis, while about half show the demand of common external border control. It is argued that the support of a common solution and joint external border control can be seen as a functional spill-over in order to preserve the open Schengen area and the status quo of the EU. As migration and the open Schengen area are two interdependent policy fields, new cooperation is perceived as necessary by most decision makers to preserve the Schengen area and thereby the status quo of the EU, which they see challenged in the 'refugee crisis'. As Anastasiades (2015, 1, Cyprus) puts it: 'In fact, the EU has no other option than becoming more actively involved and visible in the search for a solution to these problems.' Thus, it is argued that functional pressure for new cooperation was amplified during the refugee crisis as described by Niemann and Ioannou (2015) for the economic and financial crisis.

It is found that even heads of state and government, whose imaginaries reflect that no further integration is endorsed (static support, static support/anti-integration, anti-integration) support a common solution;² and demand external border control.³ One striking example is the head of government of Slovakia, Fico. His imaginary is predominantly characterised by refusal of further European integration, but still he demands the new measure of a European Border and Coast Guard: 'We will not complicate this with discussion about sovereignty. The Schengen border is our border' (Gabrizova 2016, 2). Hence, according to the mechanism of functional spill-over, as the majority of decision makers perceives that a common European solution and common external border control are necessary means, it can be expected that they will be implemented. However, overall dynamic support for further European integration is not expressed by the majority of decision makers. Therefore, further integration does not seem to be perceived necessary due to functional pressure. Only eight of the national decision makers and the two Commissioners support further integration. Therefore, it is not expected that decisions supporting overall further integration of the EU will be implemented soon. But it remains to be seen which new functional pressures arise due to the cooperation in the fields of migration and border control, which are expected to proceed to protect the open Schengen area.

In the case of the imaginaries of the national heads of state and government, as representatives of the governmental national elites, the learning process of political spill-over does not become apparent for the majority. Only eight imaginaries reflect explicit support for further European integration, which could be the result of political spill-over. For example Rõivas (2015, 4, Estonia) states: 'As Jean-Claude Juncker said in his annual State of the Union address, we need more Europe, and more union in this union.' The imaginaries of 13 heads of state and government are characterised by the wish to preserve the status quo of the EU or even refusal of European integration (static support, static support/anti-integration, anti-integration), while the imaginaries of seven heads of state and government do not show a clear position regarding European integration at all. Therefore, it is argued that for the majority of 20 heads of state and government the gradual learning process and shift of support to the supranational level does not become apparent. But it can still occur that the imaginaries of

the national decision makers change, when they perceive that issues of substantial interest can only be addressed at the European level. A large majority of the national decision makers demands a common European solution for the 'refugee crisis' expressing that they do not see national alternatives. This tendency could be a first starting point, possibly leading to political spill-over in the future. But as only the imaginaries of eight heads of state and government are characterised by dynamic support, political spill-over does not seem to have widely occurred within the governmental elites of the European Member States (yet). Accordingly, it can be expected that further integration of the EU will not be promoted by most of the governmental elites of the European Member States as a result of political spill-over.

The mechanism of cultivated spill-over refers to the process that European institutions themselves promote further integration. Both imaginaries of the Commissioners reflect (inter alia) dynamic support. Juncker (2015, 13) clearly points to his vision of a deeper integrated EU: 'We have to be more European in our method. Not because we want power at European level. But because we need urgently better and swifter results'. As the imaginaries of both Commissioners reflect dynamic support, it is argued that they will use their agenda-setting power and facilitate further integration. As already apparent in their imaginaries, they mainly do so by proposing and promoting new measures of further cooperation, e.g. the mandatory quota for the relocation of refugees in the EU, the European Border and Coast Guard system, the list of safe countries of origin and hotspots. Accordingly, it can be expected that cultivated spill-over takes place.

Dissensus about European integration

According to LI, European integration is not a dynamic process, but the consequence of rational choices by national decision makers. As outlined above, the imaginaries of the largest group of heads of state and government remain blurred without indicating which position is taken regarding European integration. No outweighing majority of imaginaries of national decision makers shows dynamic support, static support or refusal of European integration. Hence, as there is no overall agreement between national decision makers on how to support European integration, the prospects for further compromises and further integration of the EU are very low. But this expectation is not precise yet since the bargaining power of the Member States and therefore of the national heads of state and government still needs to be considered. To determine which national heads of state and government hold greater bargaining power, the Member States are divided into net payers, which hold great bargaining power, and net recipients with low bargaining power. It is argued that the four largest net payers hold the greatest bargaining power, while the four largest net recipients have the lowest bargaining power. Consequently, the imaginaries of the respective Member States are the most important or the least important for the process of European integration.

As illustrated in Table 4, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy are the highest net payers, hence holding great bargaining power, while Poland, Hungary, Greece and Romania are the highest net recipients with low bargaining power (European Commission 2016b). Interestingly, it becomes apparent that the imaginaries of the four heads of state and government with high bargaining power are more positive about the EU than the imaginaries of the heads of state and government with lower bargaining power. The heads of state and government of three of the four highest net payers, Merkel (Germany), Hollande (France) and Renzi (Italy) all express predominantly dynamic support for the EU.

Table 4. Imaginaries of the national decision makers divided into net payers and net recipients.

Prevailing Imaginary	Dynamic support	Dynamic/static support	Static support	Static support/anti-integration	Anti-integration	Blurred imaginary
Head of state/ government of net paying member state	Michel (BE), Merkel (DE), Hollande (FR), Renzi (IT)	–	Kenny (IE), Rutte (NL)	Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Siplä (FI), Cameron (UK)	–	Faymann (AT), Löfven (SE)
Head of state/ government of net receiving member state	Anastasiades (CY), Rõivas (EE)	Bettel (LU), Costa (PT)	Orešković (HR), Straujuma (LV), Muscat (MT), Cerar (SI)	Borisov (BG), Szydło (PL)	Orbán (HU), Fico (SK)	Sobotka (CZ), Tsipras (EL), Rajoy (ES), Grybauskaitė (LT), Iohannis (RO)

Note: great bargaining power, low bargaining power. Data from 2014 was used for the classification into net payers and net recipients (European Commission 2016b).

In the refugee crisis we must not give in to the temptation to fall back on national government action. On the contrary, what we need now is more Europe. More than ever we need the courage and cohesion that Europe has always shown when it was really important (Merkel 2015, 2).

Only Cameron representing the United Kingdom, the third largest net payer, formulates an imaginary remaining in-between static support and anti-integration. In contrast, the imaginaries of the largest net recipients are more negative. Szydło representing Poland, the highest net recipient, expresses an imaginary remaining in-between static support and anti-integration. In contrast to Merkel's statement she declares:

The refugee crisis also reminds us that we shall be clear on the issue of solidarity. [...] However, one cannot call solidarity the attempts to export the problems that some states had brought up, without any involvement of other states to be burdened with them (Szydło 2015, 5).

The imaginary expressed by Orbán, who represents Hungary the second largest net recipient, is even characterised by overall refusal of further European integration. Additionally, Tsipras and Iohannis, representing the third and fourth highest net recipients Greece and Romania, do not clarify their position on the European integration process. It stands out that no imaginary expressed by the representatives of the four highest net recipients reflects unrestricted static or dynamic support for the EU. This observation is unexpected, as the highest net recipients could be expected to support European integration to further benefit from net payments of the EU budget.

Following the assumptions of LI, it is argued that the prospects of further integration derived from the imaginaries are higher than before considering the bargaining power of the Member States. The heads of state and government with high bargaining power show more positive imaginaries towards the EU than the heads of state and government with lower bargaining power. They can use their superior position in intergovernmental bargaining at EU level and push through further integration. They can threaten to cut down their contribution to the European budget, leading to the loss of substantial payments for the net recipients. Furthermore, they can offer side-payments to the net recipients to increase their willingness to support further integration. As three imaginaries of the heads of state and government with high bargaining power show support for overall integration, further integration can be expected.

It stands out that the three heads of state and government with great bargaining power and in favour of further integration demand a common European solution for the 'refugee crisis'. Only Cameron (UK) does not refer to a common European solution. Accordingly, the prospects for further cooperation in the fields of migration and other policy areas relating to the immediate crisis are quite high. It is argued that similar to Schimmelfennig's (2015) observation during the economic and financial crisis, new negative international interdependencies arose in the 'refugee crisis', which are expected to be addressed by more integration in the respective fields. Altogether, according to LI, it is clear that Szydło (Poland), Orbán (Hungary), Tsipras (Greece) and Iohannis (Romania) will not take a leading role in the interstate bargaining over further integration in any field.

Conclusion

Our analysis has generated certain insights. First, we have developed the concept of European imaginary. The concept enables to capture decision makers' conceptions and broader understandings of the EU and its further integration process. The European imaginaries of political

decision makers serve as new insights to theories of European integration. The analysis of the European imaginaries offers a deeper understanding of European integration since it reveals which strategies are pursued by political decision makers at the European level. By applying the concept imaginary, the analysis of political debates in the context of the EU is enabled. The three ideal types of European imaginaries – dynamic support, static support and anti-integration – serve as a classification of the imaginaries. The ideal types enable a comparison of different European imaginaries and the interpretation along theories of European integration. Interestingly, in our analysis the largest group of European imaginaries remains blurred and not assignable to any category (or categories). To interpret this observation, further research could examine how European imaginaries evolve and which influences shape them. Additionally, we found many shared tendencies in the imaginaries of both the heads of state and government and the Commissioners. We argue that they illustrate that tendencies of supporting the EU's status quo or even supporting new cooperation in the fields directly related to the 'refugee crisis' prevail over national perspectives.

As a second insight, we derived prospects of further European integration from the European imaginaries of political decision makers. We found that according to NF the prospects for further integration remain limited, but according to LI further integration is more likely. Following NF, cultivated spill-over, whereby the European Commission fosters further integration, is expected to occur without restrictions. Functional spill-over is only expected in the fields of migration and border control as reaction to new functional pressures, which arose during the 'refugee crisis'. Hence, our analysis affirms that amplified functional pressure arose during the 'refugee crisis' in the EU as Niemann and Ioannou (2015) observed in the context of the financial crisis. It remains to be seen whether the cooperation in the current 'refugee crisis' will be a first starting point for political spill-over to occur. So far only the imaginaries of eight heads of state and government show a shift of support to the EU level, which could be the result of political spill-over. Hence, according to NF, the European Commission is expected to use its capacities to foster further integration. Besides that, there are only prospects for further European integration in the fields directly related to the 'refugee crisis'.

According to LI, the prospects for further integration are higher as the imaginaries of three national decision makers with great bargaining power correspond on support for further integration. Furthermore, as the demand of a common European solution of the 'refugee crisis' is also part of the imaginaries of three of the national decision makers with great bargaining power, further cooperation in the policy fields directly related to the 'refugee crisis' is very likely. Thereby, the national decision makers are expected to react to new negative international interdependencies, which resulted from the 'refugee crisis'. This observation corresponds with Schimmelfennig's findings (2015), which describe the emergence of negative international interdependencies during the economic and financial crisis. In sum, following NF and LI, integration is very likely in the policy fields directly related to the 'refugee crisis'. According to LI, overall deeper integration can be expected, but following NF prospects for further integration remain limited. However, as Börzel (2016) points out Member States already did not comply with EU rules in the management of the 'refugee crisis'. Therefore, it remains to be seen how much effective cooperation takes place at EU level in the aftermath of the 'refugee crisis'. Overall, our analysis has shown that the conceptual lens of 'imaginary' offers new insights to European integration theory as it can be used to analyse

decision makers' statements in current political debates and their importance for European integration.

Notes

1. This division is a simplification for analytical purposes. Bargaining power at EU level is formed in a complex process and determined by a variety of factors (e.g. Bailer 2010; Moravcsik 1997).
2. These are Borisov (BG), Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Orešković (HR), Kenny (IE), Muscat (MT), Rutte (NL) and Cerar (SI).
3. These are Løkke Rasmussen (DK), Kenny (IE), Grybauskaitė (LT), Straujuma (LV), Szydło (PL), Cerar (SI) and Fico (SK).

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