

# **The European Union's Handling of the Refugee Crisis:**

## **Implications for EU Asylum Policy**



**A Parliament Street Research Paper**

**by**

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## The European Union's Handling of the Refugee Crisis: Implications for EU Asylum Policy

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This briefing paper provides an update on European attitudes towards the European Union's (EU) handling of the ongoing refugee crisis and its implications in the wake of the recent 2018 Italian General Election.

Growing criticism amongst citizens from EU member states towards the refugee issue and increased levels of 'Euroscepticism' may conceivably hinder the EU's ability in dealing with the refugee issue. Thus, it appears that a common and more harmonised pan-European approach to the refugee crisis issue is essential.

### **(1) General discontent with the EU's handling of the Refugee Issue**

The results of the Italian election from last month indicate that Italian voters are likely to have become discontented with the EU's dealing with the refugee crisis by voting for populist right-wing parties such as Five Star Movement and the League. For a short summary and overview of the election results, please click on the link [here](#) to view our previous briefing paper.

- The Five Star Movement (**32%**) was the party with the single biggest share of support in the 2018 election, while Lega (the League) (**18%**) overtook the centre-right coalition (receiving **37%** of vote overall).
- The Five Star Movement has advocated reforming the Dublin Regulation and stopping migrant flows at the source.
- Lega has developed a strong anti-immigrant electoral manifesto, using slogans such as "stop the invasion" (stop invasione), "stop immigrants" (stop immigrati), and "Islam in school? No thank you!" (Islam a scuola? No grazie!)

Furthermore, ongoing **disaffection** among a number of citizens from EU Member States on EU asylum policy continues to be observed.

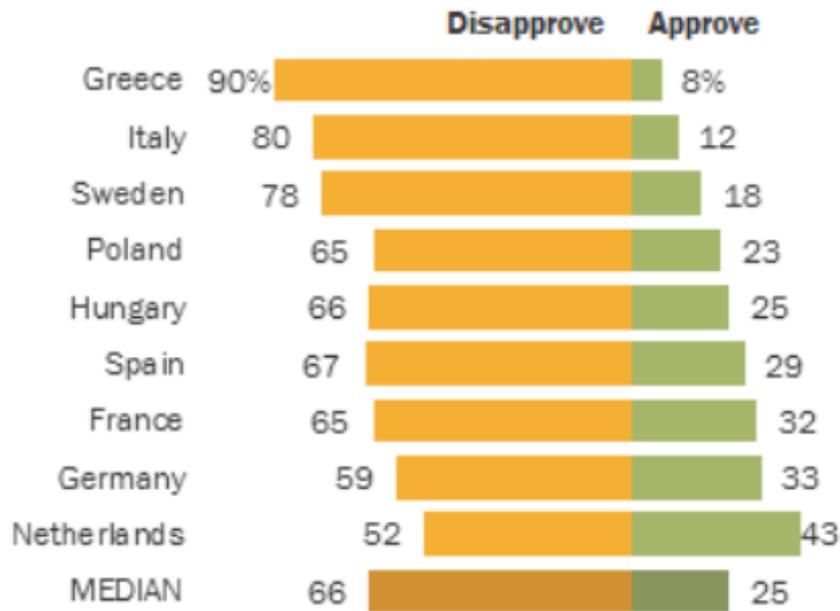
- Figure 1 below from the [Pew Research Center](#) shows that overwhelming majorities disapprove of how Brussels has dealt with the problem, including **90% of Greeks, 80% of Italians and 78% of Swedes**.
- Figure 2 shows that on migration, the vast majority of EU citizens want decisions made by their own national government (**national sovereignty**) and not taken by the EU and its associated institutions.

**Figure 1: European views of the EU handling of the refugee issue**

Source: The Pew Research Center (29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018)

## Many Europeans disapprove of the EU handling of the refugee issue

*Do you \_\_\_ of the way the European Union is dealing with the refugee issue?*



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q46b.

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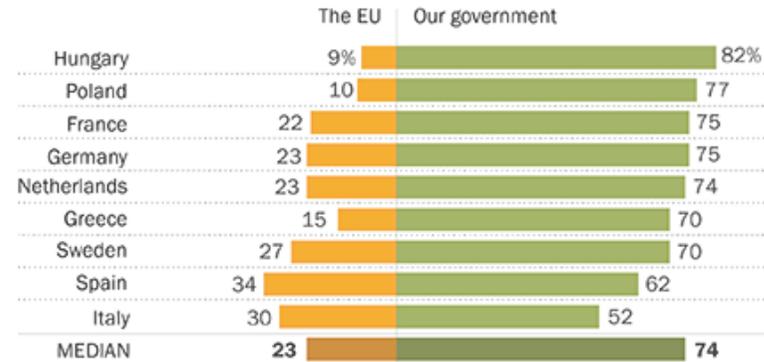
**Figure 2: European preferences over the level of decision-making on migration policy**

Source: The Pew Research Center (29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018)

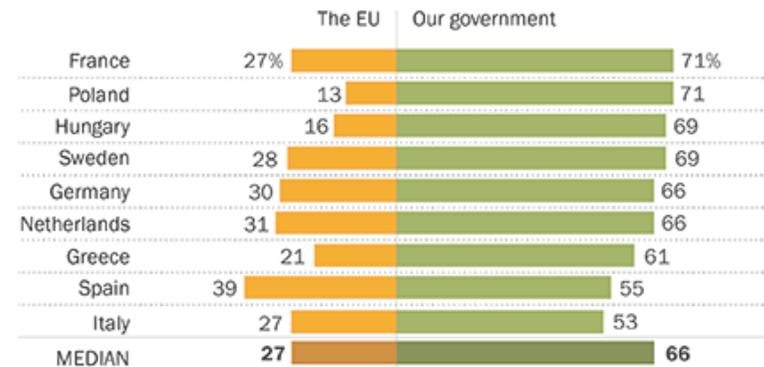
## On migration, most EU publics want decisions made by their governments, not EU

*Do you think our government should make decisions about \_\_\_ for our country or should the EU make decisions about this issue?*

### Migration of people who are not EU citizens into our country



### Migration of EU citizens into our country



Note: Volunteered categories "Both" and "Neither" not shown.

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q47b-c.

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## **(2) Implications for the EU:**

### **1) Italy's EU obligations:**

- The [electoral 'rise'](#) of radical right-wing parties has taken place in the context of the ongoing migration crisis in Europe. Recent elections across Europe have seen a number of far right parties such as the Alternative for Germany Party (AfD) in Germany, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) alongside the Front National Party (FN) in France arguably benefiting electorally from (a) widespread patterns of voter volatility and (b) the salience of the immigration issue amidst the ongoing refugee crisis context in Europe. The far right is also continuing to flourish in Central-Eastern Europe, particularly in the case of [Hungary](#) under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.
- The recent General Election in Italy has shown that Italy is no exception to the context of widespread patterns of electoral volatility and insurgent far right parties gaining electorally in national parliamentary elections. Despite rising electoral support for anti-immigration policies, countries such as Italy will have to comply with its EU obligations, for example the Dublin Regulation that obliges the first-entry country to examine asylum requests.
- Any violation would likely see an infringement procedure brought against it at the European Court of Justice.
  - It is important to note that the European Commission launched [infringement procedures](#) against Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary for non-compliance with their EU obligations over the [emergency relocation scheme](#) in June 2017.

### **2) Current reforms on EU refugee policies:**

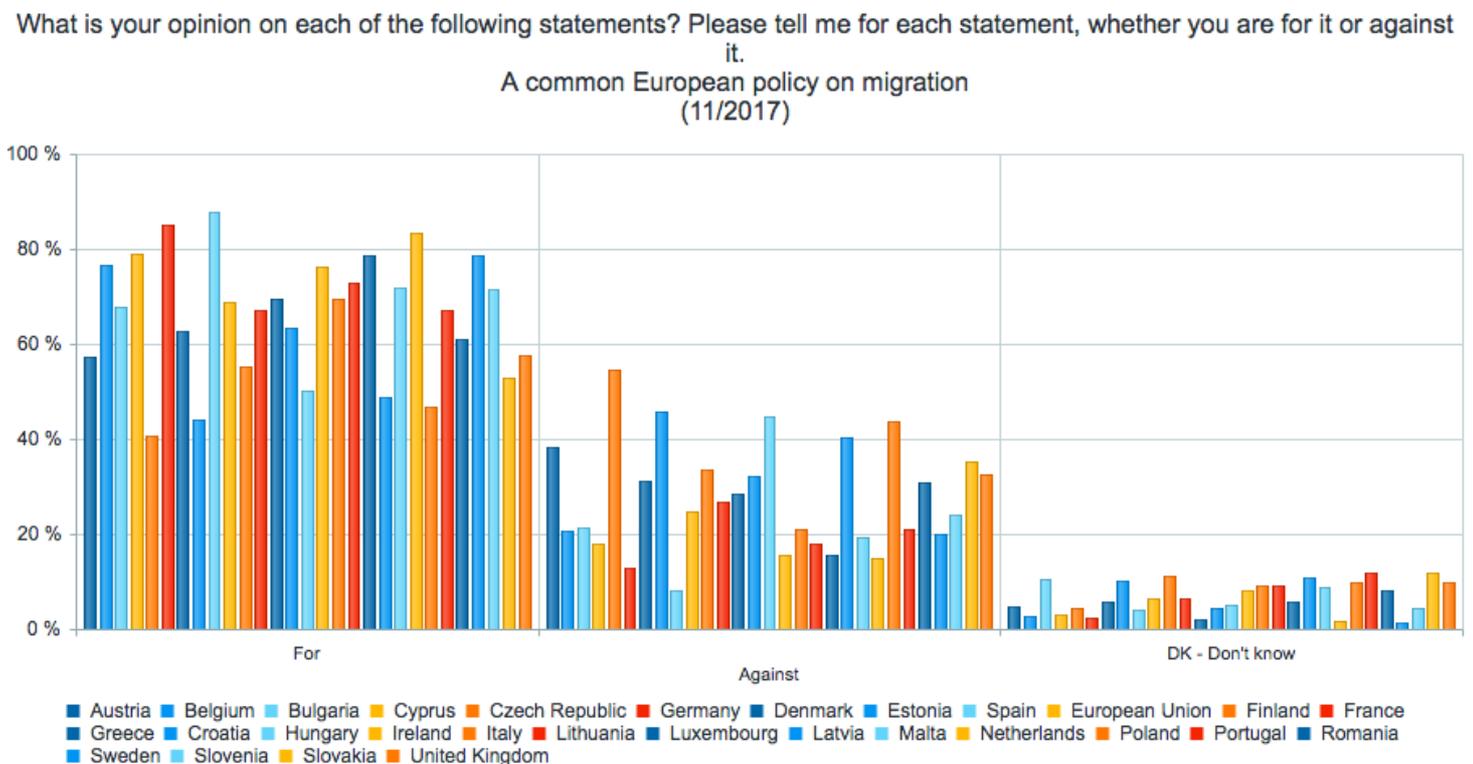
- Bulgaria has taken up the rotating presidency of the EU Council from the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2018.
- Its [priorities](#) regarding migration includes increasing the effectiveness of return policy and achieving progress on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), with the **Dublin Regulation** being a major priority.
  - The proposal for the new Dublin Regulation aims to replace the first entry criterion with a "[corrective allocation mechanism](#)" that relocates asylum seekers around the EU "in a manner consistent with the distribution key which takes into account population size and GDP".
  - The primary objectives of this reform are to bolster solidarity and enhance burden-sharing among Member States- in other words, alleviating the pressure on countries of first entry, notably those situated in

theMediterranean region, such as Greece, Italy and Spain.

- Interestingly, whilst EU publics are critical ofthe EU’s handling of the refugee crisis, they nonetheless support a common European policy on migration. This empirical evidence can be found fromthe [Eurobarometer](#) in Figure 3below.
- Therefore, widespread disaffection may wellrepresent a silver lining to push on with the reform and impose pressure on Eastern European countries, which have previously refused to support an EU quota system, to make compromises.

**Figure 3: European views of a common European policy on migration**

Source: Eurobarometer(29<sup>th</sup> March, 2018)



**(3) Key take-away points:**

A number of key patterns can be observed in this report that have implications for the future of the EU’s policies on migration in the context of the ongoing refugee crisis. Firstly, recent public opinion data has shown a hardening of attitudes, with ‘rising’ discontent amongst EU citizens in a number of countries towards the EU’s handling of the refugee crisis. The public opinion data also appears to demonstrate that a majority of citizens from EU member states believe that their own national government should have the right to make decisions on migration policy as opposed to the EU making these decisions.

Furthermore, the context of the recent 'rise' of radical right parties in a number of EU countries in the last few years (especially in the cases of Germany, Italy, Austria and to a lesser extent the Netherlands) further shows both the volatile political climate and anti-immigrant environment that the EU is currently faced with. In the context of such an environment, this is likely to make it increasingly difficult for the EU to systematically reform its current refugee policies and come to a consensus amongst member states in the near future.