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Migration and soft power: the EU's visa and refugee policy response to the war in Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the European Union's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine in the field of migration, arguing that EU visa and refugee policies encompassed a distinctive foreign policy and soft power dimension. On one hand, by restricting visa policy for Russia, the EU signalled the delegitimization and isolation of the Kremlin. On the other hand, by adopting temporary protection for Ukrainians, it sent a clear message of support to Ukraine, while also portraying the EU as the defender of freedom and democracy. Through an analysis of EU documents released in the first month of the war, the article thus posits that both visa and refugee measures were employed as soft power tools, contributing to the juxtaposition of an aggressive and isolated Russia, against a responsible and united EU.

1. Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, sending shockwaves through Europe and beyond. The human toll of the war is most vividly illustrated by the over 6 million Ukrainians who left their country in the search for safety, with the vast majority seeking refuge in Europe.[1] In response to the crisis, the European Union (EU) adopted multiple rounds of sanctions against Russia, including visa restrictions, and triggered for the first time a mechanism of "temporary protection" for Ukrainians.

This article focuses on the repercussions of the war for the EU's migration policy and its soft power. Specifically, it investigates how the EU's visa and refugee policy response to the war in Ukraine went beyond pragmatic and humanitarian considerations but also encompassed a distinctive foreign policy and soft power dimension. Migration policies and soft power have rarely been studied in conjunction, particularly in the case of the EU. Yet, available literature suggests that the former can have significant influence on the latter (Kaya 2020; Kirisçi 2005; Tolay 2016; Tsourapas 2018). This is well-exemplified by the United States' Cold War open-door policy for people fleeing communist countries,

which was meant to discredit the Soviet Union, and to bolster the attractiveness of the USA (and with it, its soft power). Applying such insights to the case of the recent Russian invasion, this research asks: How did the European Union respond to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine in the field of migration, and how did such response aim to contribute to its foreign policy objectives and soft power?

Analyzing EU policies, documents and speeches, published and delivered in the first month of the war, the article argues that migration policy was, from early on, a fundamental component in the EU's foreign policy and in the projection of its soft power, in two ways. On the one hand, the EU suspended the visa facilitation agreement with Russia, signalling the Kremlin's isolation and condemning its actions. On the other hand, the EU adopted "temporary protection" (TP) for Ukrainians, underlining its responsibility and solidarity with Ukraine. Ultimately, the EU leveraged its visa and refugee policy to project and strengthen its soft power by juxtaposing the image of an aggressive and isolated Russia, against that of a responsible and united EU, and by emphasizing the clash between democratic and authoritarian values.

The article makes three contributions. First, it adds to the international relations literature by contending that visa and refugee policies can be understood and leveraged as soft power tools. These policies can shape perceptions and narratives concerning the legitimacy, responsibility, and human rights record of various governments, ultimately aiming to influence countries' "power of attraction" on the international stage. Second, the article contributes to debates in migration studies by examining the EU's response to the war in Ukraine, encompassing the widely-discussed TP (see Carrera and Ineli-Ciger 2023) but also extending the analysis to include EU visa policy towards Russia. Lastly, the article adds to European studies by demonstrating that, despite EU migration policies having typically been understood as damaging its soft power and reputation, particularly following the "migration crisis" (see Longo 2020), in the specific case of the war in Ukraine the opposite occurred, as TP can be understood as a tool to enhance the EU's soft power.

The paper is structured as follows. The theoretical section discusses the link between migration, foreign policy and soft power, focusing particularly on visa and refugee policies. After a discussion of the methodology used, the empirical part then analyzes EU policies, speeches and documents released in the first month of the war, to understand whether and how migration was leveraged for foreign policy goals and soft power. The empirical discussion is centred on the restriction of visa policy for Russians, and on the adoption of temporary protection for Ukrainians.

2. Migration, foreign policy and soft power

The link between migration, international relations and foreign policy has traditionally received limited attention, insofar as the former was considered a "low politics" matter (e.g. Duncan 2020; Mitchell 1989). In recent years, however, "migration diplomacy" has gained prominence as a pivotal concern. Based on Google's database of published books, the frequency of the term almost quintupled between 2011 and 2019.[2]

"Migration diplomacy" includes both "the strategic use of migration flows as a means to obtain other aims", and "the use of diplomatic methods to achieve goals related to migration" (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018, 4–5). As such, it encapsulates both how states leverage migration for other objectives, and how they use other policies or tools

to obtain agreements on migration matters (Adamson and Tsourapas 2018). The former aspect is exemplified by Gaddafi's threat to "turn Europe black", should it not have received €5bn from Italy and the EU,[3] as well as by the US open-door policy towards refugees from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, meant to delegitimize the competing bloc. As for the latter meaning of "migration diplomacy", this is evidenced by the EU and its member states (MSs) relying on measures such as quotas and development aid to incentivize third countries to cooperate on migration control.

In this article, I focus on the former aspect, namely how migration is leveraged for other goals. In particular, as the Libyan and US examples above reveal, states may use migration as leverage in two main ways: for coercion, or for attraction and persuasion (Kaya 2020, 39). The study of how states leverage migration as a tool for coercion is perhaps the strand of migration diplomacy that is gaining the most popularity. Here, migration is understood as a tool that is being instrumentalized to induce (or prevent) changes in other actors' behaviour through threats, intimidation or pressure. Greenhill (2010)'s "Weapons of mass migration" is one of the key texts on the matter, analyzing what the author calls "coercive engineered migrations", namely "cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state" (Greenhill 2010, 14).

The growing popularity of the "coercion" strand of migration diplomacy appears to be driven by contemporary cases in which countries of origin or transit (from Belarus to Morocco and Turkey) have leveraged migration in their relationships with countries of destination. At the same time, such studies have been criticized for showing a realist bias, being overly concerned with material interests, to the expense of soft power and ideological factors (Tolay 2022). Indeed, several authors within this sub-field of migration diplomacy subscribe (more or less explicitly) to the realist tradition. On the contrary, the relationship between migration and soft power has remained comparatively underexplored.

As defined by Nye (2004, 5), soft power refers to the ability to get others "to want the outcomes that you want" through co-option, rather than coercion. As such, soft power aims to shape others' preferences by attracting them, for instance, by setting an example. To do so, it relies on three main types of resources: culture (when it is seen as appealing), political values (when they are lived up to, in practice) and foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate) (Nye 2004, 11). The literature on soft power emphasizes the significance of intangible and communicative elements. As stressed by Nye (2004, 107–108), public diplomacy is an important way to enhance soft power, through daily communication with both domestic and foreign audiences. Indeed, sates and actors not only use communication to disseminate information about their values and policies, but can make a strategic use of narratives, to influence target audiences and shape how ideas are projected and received (Mattern 2005; Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin 2014). Ultimately, Mattern (2005, 585) argues, "attraction is constructed through communicative exchange".

As anticipated, few authors have analyzed migration and migration policy as tools of attraction and soft power. Among them, Tolay (2016) argues that migration policy and discourse shape how states' power and status are perceived in the international arena. In other words, countries may use migration not only for coercion, but also to tentatively enhance their power status. More specifically, Tolay maintains that a country receiving and hosting large number of migrants may be seen in one of two ways: Either as a

power*ful* country, attractive to foreigners thanks to its economic or political context, or as a power*less* country, unable to control its borders. Examining Turkey's response to Syrian refugees' displacement, the author shows that the country was involved in a "discursive battle" to project a powerful image of itself. By adopting an open-door policy for Syrians, and reportedly investing 10 billion dollars in their reception, Turkish leaders aimed to portray their country as "powerful, responsible and virtuous", and as a regional power (Tolay 2016, 136, 140–141). From this, we can derive that states can employ migration policy to project a certain image of themselves, and as means to enhance their soft power.

Nye himself argued that immigration benefits the United States' soft power, insofar as it enhances the country's appeal and presents the USA as "a magnet" (Nye 2012). This suggests that a range of migration policies may be employed as instruments of soft power. Visa and refugee policies are perhaps the most straightforward example of how this has been done historically and, as such, they will be discussed in depth in the following sub-section. Beyond visa and refugee aspects, however, one could also envision other migration measures as tools to promote soft power. Student exchange programmes, for instance, can enhance cultural understanding and destination countries' attractiveness (Borrell 2023; Tsourapas 2018, 9). By the same logic, labour-migration agreements may contribute to a country's soft power by fostering connections and cultural awareness. In some instances, even promoting high-skilled emigration can bolster the soft power of the origin country: As argued by Tsourapas (2018), Egypt under Nasser encouraged the emigration of its high-skilled workers, to enhance its role in promoting pan-Arabism in the Middle East.[4]

Overall, although migration has rarely been linked to soft power, existing evidence suggests that different migration policies can be leveraged as means to shape soft power. In the next pages, I explore sure argument through the lenses of visa and refugee policies.

2.1. Visa and refugee policies

Visa policies define the requirements to enter and remain in a given territory. Insofar as they are selective, foreseeing different requirements for different countries, they are inherently a foreign policy tool, signalling "something" to, or about, another country's government. The selectivity of current visa policies is evident both in the EU (Finotelli and Sciortino 2013), and globally (Mau et al. 2015). Be it enough to consider different passports' "strength", with Swedish, German and Swiss citizens having visa-free access to 132 countries, and Afghans, Syrians and Iraqis to less than 10.[5] Thus, while a generous visa policy can build bridges and promote partnerships, a restrictive visa policy can damage relations and project disapproval. As argued by Duncan (2020, 16), the introduction of a new visa requirement is often "embarrassing" for the target state, signalling "an implicit indictment" of its government.

Visa policies are not only an intrinsic foreign policy instrument, but can be seen as tools of soft power too. How this happens is explored by Kirisçi (2005), who defends that liberal visa policies can substantially enhance soft power, projecting openness and inclusiveness. Examining the case of Turkey, the author finds that at the end of the Cold War, the country engaged in visa facilitation and liberalization with several former Soviet republics. This strengthened Turkish relations with such countries,

building "cultural, economic, political and social bridges" between them (Kirişçi 2005, 364). Overall, Kirişçi (2005) builds on the case of Turkey to argue that if the EU were to adopt a "friendlier" visa policy towards its neighbourhood, this would boost its soft power in the region, sending a strong message of inclusiveness, rather than of exclusion. In her words, "a friendlier or more flexible Schengen visa system … could become an important instrument in the EU 'soft power' toolbox" (Kirişçi 2005, 364).

On the flipside, restrictive visa policies can damage a country's power of attraction. The UK's parliamentary Committee on Soft Power advances such argument, maintaining that the UK's restrictive visa and immigration policies are weakening British soft power. This is because such policies "undermin[e] the attractiveness of the UK as a place to do business with; visit; and study", and ultimately damage the country's "reputation for openness" (House of Lords 2014, 107, 111).

On top of visa, asylum and refugee policies are a second, crucial example of how migration policy can contribute to shaping foreign policy and soft power. Indeed, the degree of openness to asylum seekers and refugees of specific nationalities (e.g. Ukrainians) implies a judgment on their countries' safety, human rights standards, and freedom from persecution. It can de-legitimize other governments, labelling them as oppressive or unable to prevent persecution (Abdelaaty 2021, 23–24; Rosenblum and Salehyan 2004). The Organization of African Unity seems to recognize the above, as it found it necessary to stress that granting international protection is "a peaceful and humanitarian act and shall not be regarded as an unfriendly act by any Member States" (cited in Abdelaaty 2021, 24). What the quote reveals is that, while accepting asylum-seekers from adversarial governments discredits them and promotes defection, doing the same from friendly countries can be "diplomatically costly" (see Rosenblum and Salehyan 2004, 679).

US refugee policies during the Cold War are a crucial example of how refugee policy is employed for foreign policy considerations, and leveraged for soft power purposes. Indeed, in 1957, the US Refugee Escape Act defined "refugees", as people fleeing a "Communist or Communist-dominated country or … any country in the Middle East" (Rosenblum and Salehyan 2004), unambiguously linking international protection to ideological and foreign policy considerations. This was to the extent that a 1953 National Security Council document explicitly described US refugee policy as intended to "encourage defection of all USSR nationals and 'key' personnel from the satellite countries", and expected it to "inflict a psychological blow on Communism" (cited in Newland 1995). According to another official report, the Soviet Union appeared to recognize the damage that emigration was causing to its "prestige", and thus launched a campaign to prevent potential "escapees" from leaving (Operations Coordinating Board 1956). Overall, during the Cold War in the USA, refugees came to symbolize the deliberate choice of freedom over communism (Anderson 2013, 55).

The US definition of "refugee" eventually changed in 1980, when the country adopted the UN criteria. However, there is evidence of a "foreign policy bias" continuing: Even after the 1980s, people fleeing Communist countries generally had higher asylum recognition rates in the USA, than people fleeing similarly oppressive, but friendlier, governments (Mitchell 1989; Newland 1995; Rosenblum and Salehyan 2004). Moreover, the former were often accepted as refugees regardless of the specific motives for leaving (Newland 1995).

Overall, through the above, we see a clear use of refugee policy for foreign policy and soft power purposes: by adopting an open-door policy for people leaving the Soviet Union, the USA sought to prove its power of attraction; by accepting them as "refugees", it aimed to delegitimize communist regimes.

Although this argument has been advanced less frequently in the case of European Cold War refugee policies, Comte (2020, 462) suggests that cooperation on migration matters in Europe was in fact "a major component of Western Cold War strategy". In particular, European countries' decision to welcome Hungarians escaping from the 1956–1957 Soviet invasion was not, Comte argues, driven by "sudden sympathy" (Comte 2020, 462). Instead, cooperation on migration (through refugees' acceptance and resettlement, for instance) had come to be seen as an *offensive* strategy against the Soviet Union, to weaken Eastern European economies by reducing their workforce, diminishing support for Communist governments, and promoting further emigration (Comte 2020, 467).

In today's context, the EU's concept of "safe country of origin" (SCO) could be an example of a refugee policy with significant soft power implications. Through the SCO principle, some countries are considered "safe" and thus their citizens' asylum applications can be processed in a faster way. To relate this to the Russia–Ukraine conflict, as of June 2021 in the EU, only one country (Denmark) recognized Russia as a safe country of origin, whereas 41% of MSs recognized Ukraine as such.[6] Ultimately, Mitchell (1989, 689) argues, the "classification (as labor migrant or refugee) is often itself the subject of ideological reasoning".

It is worth noting, however, that the concept of soft power has been rarely applied to contemporary EU migration policies. Although the EU has constructed itself as a "normative power" (Manners 2002), its soft power has been questioned in recent years, in light of growing contestation from both within and without. This contestation has built on growing Euroscepticism, Brexit, and the emergence of new powers on the global stage, but also on the EU's response to the 2015 "migration crisis". Indeed, the latter has been regarded by commentators as weakening the EU's soft power and reputation, since it revealed a significant divergence between the values the EU promoted (of openness, solidarity, and human rights protection), and the ones it enforced (of closure, self-interest, and securitization) (see Longo 2020; Ludewig 2021). Latin America's approach to irregular migration is a further example of the contestation of EU soft power in the field of migration, insofar as it was developed in conscious opposition to the EU's securitization paradigm (at least on paper) (see Acosta Arcarazo and Geddes 2014).

In summary, migration policy can be leveraged by states for foreign policy and soft power purposes, in the attempt to enhance their status on the world scene, or vice-versa to delegitimize others'. As I have argued, this is particularly visible in the field of visa and refugee policies, which inherently imply a judgment on other countries and their governments. In this context, EU refugee and migration policies are more often depicted as a hindrance, more than an asset, for the Union's soft power. As we will see, however, in the specific case of Ukraine, the EU attempted to reverse such narrative, using its refugee policy to project the image of a responsible actor in the international sphere.

3. Methodology

The article focuses on the 2022 invasion of Ukraine to explore the relationship between migration, foreign policy and soft power, adopting a case study approach. While a case study analysis is limited in scope, compared to a large-n study, it offers a holistic understanding of a process and its context, and is a crucial tool for the development and advancement of theory (George and Bennett 2004; Kohlbacher 2006).

I complement the case study approach with a qualitative content analysis, studying selected EU documents in detail, to unveil latent patterns and themes (cf. Kohlbacher 2006). This method has been found to be useful for case study research, as it enables a close connection between theory and data, while also placing the material in its broader context (Kohlbacher 2006). Qualitative content analysis is also particularly suited for the present investigation, due to the key communicative aspects that are intrinsic to soft power (see discussion above). Going back to the original EU documents is therefore important to delve into EU representations of migration and the war.

The article draws on 110 EU documents released during the first month of the war, from 24 February to 24 March 2022. This was a crucial moment for the development of the EU's response to the conflict, during which the EU already adopted four rounds of sanctions against Russia, as well as temporary protection for Ukrainians. Documents analyzed include: Official documents (such as Commission proposals and communications, Council conclusions and decisions), Commissioners' speeches and remarks, Council press releases, agendas and background briefings (with a focus on the European Council, as well as the Justice and Home Affairs and the Foreign Affairs Councils). While official documents are related to temporary protection and visa only, other documents have a broader focus on migration, foreign policy, and Ukraine, in order to place the EU's visa and refugee policy in the broader context of its response to the war.

I study such documents to learn about the EU's response in the field of migration, as well as how this was leveraged for foreign policy objectives and soft power. Codes were therefore initially informed by the literature on migration, foreign policy, soft power, the Russia–Ukraine war, and TP, and then inductively expanded and refined based on a preliminary analysis of the material (see Kohlbacher 2006).

4. Empirical analysis

The Russian invasion of Ukraine starting on 24 February 2022, created ripples throughout Europe and beyond. The EU responded with swift sanctions in the days before and after the war: The first package was adopted on February 23, but by February 25, a second round of sanctions was already launched, targeting the financial, energy, transport and technological sectors, as well as visa policies for diplomats.[7] On February 28, a third package was launched, and on March 15 a fourth one. On March 2, the EU suspended the broadcasting of Russia Today and Sputnik, accused of being involved in Russia's misinformation campaign (20220302 Council Press Release). At the time of writing (August 2023), 11 packages of sanctions have been launched by the EU.

In this context, the flight of Ukrainians has been one of the clearest expressions of the war. As of 6 March 2022, less than two weeks after the start of the war, 1.8 million people had fled Ukraine (COM 2022b, 107 final). As of March 21, less than a month since the

invasion began, almost 3 million people had arrived in the EU (2022c/C 126 I/01). Responding to the above, the EU triggered Directive 2001/55/EC on March 4, providing Ukrainians in the EU with "temporary protection".[8]

How did the EU's visa policy and temporary protection aim to contribute to its foreign policy objectives and soft power, if at all? I consider each policy in turn.

4.1. Visa policy: delegitimizing and isolating Russia

Right upon the outbreak of the war, the EU decided to suspend the visa facilitation agreement it had with Russia. If initially, the measure only targeted Russian diplomats and businesspersons, by 31 August 2022, EU ministers had eventually agreed to suspend the visa facilitation process for all travellers entering the EU for short stays (20220909 Council Press Release).

Why was the visa facilitation process suspended? To begin with, official documents denounced Russia for infringing international law. Indeed, the European Council Conclusions announcing visa restrictions (and the second round of sanctions) "condemn[ed] in the strongest possible terms" Russia's "unprovoked and unjustified" invasion of Ukraine (EUCO 18/22 2022a). They also highlighted Russia's violation of international law, as well as the threat it posed to security, both in Europe and globally. In similar fashion, Council Decision 2022/333 on the suspension of visa facilitation underlined Russia's "severe breach" of international law, and justified the restriction of visa on the need to protect the "essential interests" of the EU and its MSs, given the proximity of the conflict.

Thus, Russia's condemnation strongly emerges from the documents, and is indeed a theme that recurs in virtually all of the documents analyzed. The war is deemed as "devastating", "barbaric", and "the gravest act of aggression on European soil in decades" (see EUCO 18/22 2022a; 20220224 VdL; 20220224 VdL NATO; 20220228 Informal FAC Main results). Similarly, the phrase "unprovoked and unjustified", used to describe the invasion of Ukraine, recurs in almost forty documents, evidencing the intense emphasis placed on delegitimizing Russia's actions in the eyes of Europeans and of the international community.

As such, Russia is depicted as isolated. In the words of the European Council (EUCO 18/22 2022a): "The use of force and coercion to change borders has no place in the twenty-first century". This statement aims to discredit Russia's behaviour, prompting its side-lining by the international community. As further noted by Commissioner for the Economy Gentiloni, even countries that Putin would traditionally consider in its sphere of influence – Ukraine, as well as Georgia and Moldova – have now applied for EU membership (20220322 Gentiloni).

Although visa restrictions may initially appear as secondary sanctions, they in fact carry strategic significance and symbolism, by actively delegitimizing Russia and highlighting its isolation. As stated by Czech Minister of the Interior Rakušan (20220909 Council Press Release):

> "A visa facilitation agreement allows privileged access to the EU for citizens of trusted partners with whom we share common values. With its unprovoked and unjustified war … Russia has broken this trust and trampled on the fundamental values of our international community."

Thus, two different realities are highlighted: the law-abiding "trusted" partners that share EU values and to which the EU grants special treatment; and law-breaking Russia, which is no longer part of such inner circle. The contrast is even more evident recalling that Ukrainians have enjoyed visa-free access to the EU since 2017, and that the provision is still in place.[9]

The significance of visa policy for the EU's soft power becomes particularly clear when considering French and German concerns about the potential perception of stricter visa regulations among the Russian population. Indeed, in the debate leading up to visa restrictions, the two countries cautioned against more radical measures such as travel bans (which were favoured by some Eastern member states), to avoid "feeding the Russian narrative … or estranging future generations" (Siebold and Lopatka 2022). German Foreign Minister Baerbock further underlined the need not to "punish dissidents" attempting to flee Russia (Siebold and Lopatka 2022). Ultimately, such concerns were taken into account, and the Council determined that specific groups of individuals, including "journalists, dissidents and civil society representatives", would be exempt from the restrictions (20220909 Council Press Release).

The episode underscores the relevance of visa policy for public diplomacy. First, it points to the need to fine-tune the message for the Russian public, in order to amplify, and avoid undermining, the EU's appeal. Second, it evidences the EU's outreach to Russians critical of Putin's government. Indeed, throughout the database, there is a recurring personalized condemnation of Putin himself, rather than of Russia as a whole, with frequent references to "Putin's war", to Russian people not wanting the conflict, and to the EU's openness towards them (e.g. 20220307 Timmermans; 20220224 VDL; 20220301 VdL at EP; see also 20220226 VdL; 20220323 VdL at EP). Through the above, we can identify the discursive isolation not only of Russia from the international community, but also of Putin from Russians themselves.

In sum, tightening its visa policy towards Russia, the EU aimed to delegitimize the Kremlin's actions and weaken the country's leadership, in the eyes of the international community and of Russian people. As will be shown in the next section, to the image of a non-compliant and isolated Russia, the EU contraposed an image of itself as responsible and united.

4.2. Temporary protection: backing Ukraine, and projecting the image of a responsible and united EU

The EU's response to Ukrainian refugees caught most observers by surprise. Originally adopted in 2001, the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) grants special rights to displaced people in the case of a "mass influx", providing access to residence permits, employment, housing, medical assistance, and education. Despite being in place since 2001, the TPD had never been triggered, and the Commission had in fact concluded that it needed to be repealed, insofar as it "no longer respond[ed] to Member States' current reality" (SWD 2020, 207 final).

The above explains the surprise that several commentators felt when, upon the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU responded with an unanticipated welcoming attitude towards Ukrainian refugees and decided to activate the TPD.[10] Indeed, an extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council was held on 27 February 2022, just three days

after the war began. During this session, ministers considered establishing a temporary protection mechanism, a proposal that soon gained "broad support" among the member states (20220227 JHA Main Results). Consequently, the Commission tabled a formal proposal on March 2, which was adopted by the Council only two days later, on March 4.

Why was temporary protection adopted? The debate on the adoption of temporary protection has highlighted two main factors: selectivity and pragmatism. On the one hand, the selective use of the TPD for Ukrainians but not for previous refugee flows (e.g. from Syria) has led scholars to attribute the adoption of the measure to selectivity, ethnic considerations and discrimination. Ineli-Ciger (2023, 69), for instance, argues that TP was adopted "because Ukraine is acknowledged as a European country" and Ukrainians as "white Christian Europeans". Indeed, politicians' statements to that effect are plenty, highlighting the "Europeanness" of Ukrainians, their "blue eyes and blond hair" (e.g. Bayoumi 2022). On the other hand, the literature has highlighted several reasons driven by pragmatism. First, the geographic proximity to Ukraine made the EU a "location of first response" to the displacement caused by the war (Van Selm 2023, 371). Second, TP is said to have been motivated by the speed and scale of arrivals, which was itself enhanced by Ukrainians' visa-free access to the EU for short stays of up to 90 days (Ineli-Ciger 2023, 74). Third, and adding to the above, there is no "buffer state" between the EU and Ukraine to which migration control can be externalized (as had been the case with Turkey or Libya in the past), as four MSs share a land border with Ukraine (Ineli-Ciger 2023, 77).

Looking at the Commission's TP proposal (COMM 2022a, 91 final), several themes emerge. As in the case of visa policies, the proposal opens by condemning Russia's "unprovoked and unjustified aggression" and its violation of international law, as well as by highlighting the risks for European and global security. It then describes the situation facing the EU: As of March 2, 650,000 Ukrainians had already entered the EU, particularly through Eastern member states. Because of the EU's geographical proximity to Ukraine, and because Ukrainians have visa-free access to the EU, a "mass influx" is deemed likely, and it is estimated that up to 6.5 million people could flee Ukraine due to the war. Finally, the proposal underlines that temporary protection would have multiple benefits: While Ukrainians would receive harmonized protection and rights throughout the EU, Member States' asylum systems would not be overwhelmed, and TP would "promote a balance of efforts" between member states (avoiding the responsibility for protection from falling disproportionately on Eastern member states). Overall, concerns about the speed and scale of arrivals, including potential risks to MSs' asylum systems, were the most frequent theme in the Commission's TP proposal. While this does not negate the selectivity argument (which may be expected to be less explicit in official documents), it shows that practical considerations were presented as crucial for the adoption of TP.

On top of the stated pragmatic considerations, and of the selectivity concerns highlighted by the literature, I argue that we can understand TP as having a distinctive foreign policy and soft power dimension too.

First, pragmatism itself can be interpreted as linked to soft power considerations. Recalling Tolay (2016)'s argument that states receiving mass migration can project a stronger or weaker image of their power, we can apply a similar reasoning to the EU's

case. Having received 650,000 Ukrainians in the first two weeks of the conflict, and knowing that numbers were destined to increase, the EU could have either projected an image of itself as power*ful* (as a Union who takes up responsibility, and whose values and norms attract Ukrainians), or as power*less* (whose asylum system fails to cope with the situation). The EU chose the former, embracing temporary protection, in an effort to avoid being perceived as powerless.

Second, by welcoming Ukrainians, the EU sent a clear message in support of Ukraine. Indeed, both in TP and other documents we see regular commitments to the EU's unity and solidarity with Kiev. Moreover, from early on, the Commission explicitly referred to temporary protection as part of a broader set of measures to respond to the war (COM 2022a, 91 final), signalling its intention to employ TP for broader foreign policy objectives. Finally, around the time of the adoption of the Versailles Declaration (on 11 March 2022), we begin to see references to Ukraine as belonging to "our European family", a phrase mostly mentioned in relation to the country's EU membership application. Overall, by regularly emphasizing solidarity with Ukraine and the threats to "European and global security" (EUCO 18/22 2022a; COMM 2022a, 91 final), EU documents portray the Russian invasion as a conflict not only with Ukraine but also with Europe and the "democratic world" (see next section too).[11]

Third, the EU leveraged TP to present itself as a responsible and united actor, in what can be interpreted as an effort to boost its soft power (possibly also in response to critiques deriving from its management of the "migration crisis"). Indeed, despite long-standing and ongoing divergences on migration and asylum reforms, when discussing temporary protection, EU leaders highlighted the cohesiveness of the bloc in adopting the measure, projecting an image of a unified Europe. As an example, Home Affairs Commissioner Johansson wrote in March 2022 that, since the war started, the EU has been "stronger, more united and indeed more humane, than maybe ever before", and exemplified this by referring to the adoption of temporary protection (Johansson 2022). Unity is further stressed by the Council of the EU in announcing the formal adoption of TP, a decision that was taken "unanimously" (20220303 JHA Main results). Although this may seem a simple statement of facts, it is noticeable, since activating temporary protection only requires qualified majority voting (Carrera et al. 2023, 19). The Council press release continues: "Faced with this crisis at the heart of our continent, Europeans are responding with unity and solidarity". Thus, the internal cohesiveness of the Union is emphasized, both in TP documents and beyond.

The depiction of EU's unity is closely associated to its responsibility. While Russia acts against international law, the EU is aware of its duty to make "the right choices", which need to be "intelligent and strategic" (20220225 FAC Main Results; 20220323 Michel at EP). Likewise, in announcing the first round of sanctions against Russia on February 22, Commission President Von der Leyen highlighted that these were "calibrated measures", thus contrasting law-abiding EU, with law-infringing Russia (20220222 VdL).

Such responsibility is in turn enhanced by a sense of urgency, which permeates all documents. Speeches refer to the war as a "tectonic shift" (Versailles Declaration 2022), and Von der Leyen stresses that "every second, a child from Ukraine arrives in our Union" (20220323 VdL at EP). The emphasis on urgency is understandable given the timeframe of the analysis (the first month of the war). However, it is particularly interestingly considering that urgency and emergency logics have frequently been

employed to support restrictive measures (e.g. Castelli-Gattinara 2017). The case of the TPD shows that the opposite can also be the case: in other words, urgency is sometimes invoked to support more generous migration policies.

Overall, although official documents present pragmatic considerations as key to the adoption of TP, we can understand the latter as strictly linked to foreign policy and soft power considerations too. Indeed, the EU used TP to signal support to Ukraine, and to present itself as a powerful, responsible and united actor on the international stage, in what can be regarded as an attempt to enhance its soft power.

4.3. "A clash of two worlds"?

So far, I have focused on the EU's visa and refugee policies as foreign policy instruments that can contribute to the projection of soft power. However, as per Nye (2004)'s formulation, soft power also relies on culture and values. To what extent do EU documents portray a clash of ideologies or blocs? On the day of the invasion, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Borrell, emphasized: "This is not a question of blocs, this is not a question of diplomatic power games" (20220224 HR/VP), thereby distancing the situation from Cold War dynamics. However, such rhetoric was soon to be challenged.

Indeed, only a few days later, Commission President Von der Leyen addressed the European Parliament, conveying a markedly different message. After recalling Soviet forces marching into Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, she referenced an article from a Ukrainian newspaper. The article stated: "This is not just about Ukraine. It is a clash of two worlds, two polar sets of values" (in 20220301 VDL at EP). Von der Leyen then echoed the message, adding:

> They are so right. This is a clash between the rule of law and the rule of the gun; between democracies and autocracies; between a rules-based order and a world of naked aggression. (20220301 VDL at EP)

The statement holds particular significance, and not solely because it came from the Commission President. Indeed, through such statement, Von der Leyen made a clear distinction between two distinct "worlds": one characterized as democratic, compliant with international law, and peaceful; the other depicted as authoritarian, infringing international agreements, and aggressive. Such discourse directly evokes memories of the Cold War, through the discursive juxtaposition of Russia and the EU, and of the "worlds" they represent.

While only few other speeches include direct references to the Cold War or the Soviet Union, a contraposition of EU and Russian values emerges from several documents. I have already argued that the EU is framed as responsible and united, Russia as aggressive and isolated. Beyond that, the "shared values of freedom and democracy" are portrayed as contested. Putin's attack on Ukraine is framed as "an attack on all the principles we hold dear": democracy, sovereignty, freedom (Von der Leyen in 20220310 Commission Announcement). Vice-versa, it causes the EU to stand with Ukraine "on the side of freedom and democracy", and prompts "the democratic world" to rise against Russia (20220308 Michel Letter; 20220323 Michel at EP; similarly 20220224 HR/VP). Ukraine itself becomes bearer of EU values. This is most evident in the Versailles Declaration

(2022), where EU leaders praised Ukrainians for protecting "*their* country and *our* shared values" (emphasis added).

Within this clash of values, the EU presents itself as having a leading role in the international community. It presents itself as aiming to be a "quiet superpower", in Gentiloni's words (20220322 Gentiloni). Indeed, the EU and its member states are portrayed as key actors, whose response to the war will have repercussions far beyond Europe (20220311 VdL), and whose measures are coordinated with international partners including the USA, the G7, NATO, and beyond (see 20220226 VdL; 20220224 VdL NATO; EUCO 18/22 2022a). As emphasized by Council President Michel: "Europe can, if we so desire, have a real capacity for influence and power in the service of peace and of our values" (20220323 Michel at EP). In this way, the values of liberty and democracy become the cornerstone of successful societies, and of a model that autocrats like Putin are said to be fearing (20220224 VdL; 20220307 Timmermans).

In light of the above, the international community emerges as a key target audience for the EU's discourse, aimed at prompting support for Ukraine and showcasing the attractiveness of the EU model. Indeed, while the war fostered unity within the EU and the West, the anticipated global condemnation of Russia did not materialize, with over 40 countries repeatedly abstaining or opposing United Nations' resolutions condemning Russia (Alden 2023). Thus, to the international community, the EU emphasized its commitment to democracy and freedom, and the need for a united front against Russia's invasion.

Simultaneously, the EU's discourse targeted the domestic audience, lauding the EU's response and underscoring the need for internal cohesion amid the crisis. Indeed, Von der Leyen and other EU leaders regularly praised Europeans' response to Ukrainian refugees: Not only is the EU applauded for acting promptly and cohesively, but Europeans are also commended for their compassion and solidarity (e.g. COMM 2022b, 107 final; EUCO 1/22 2022b; 20220301 VdL at EP; 20220322 Šefčovič; 20220322 Gentiloni; 20220323 VdL at EP; 20220323 VdL and Trudeau). Notably, this approach appears somewhat successful, as polls indicate increased support for EU integration since the war's onset (Zimmerman 2023), and even far-right parties traditionally opposed to sanctions against Russia ended up accepting them (e.g. in Italy – see Carlotti 2023).

In summary, while EU migration policies are framed as a legitimate response to Russia's illegitimate invasion (as seen in the previous sections), EU values are portrayed as shared and upheld by the "democratic world". Similar to the Cold War era, migration policy is employed to convey solidarity with those escaping from the other "world" (termed "communist" then, "undemocratic" today) and to discredit such regimes. In doing so, a positive/negative branding emerges, in which EU soft power is defined in opposition to Russia's: While Russia is isolated, the EU is united; while Russia infringes international law, the EU responsibly welcomes refugees; while Russia threatens European and global security, the EU defends freedom and democracy.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, what have the consequences of the war been, for EU migration policy and its soft power? The Russian invasion of Ukraine led to an unprecedented response by the EU, particularly concerning temporary protection. In a context of longstanding and

ongoing internal divisions on migration and asylum matters, as well as of a migration system often accused of being based on restrictiveness and securitization, the war drastically reversed the EU's approach, leading it to overcome the Dublin system (in this one occasion) and to establish temporary protection for Ukrainians.

As I have argued, the war also led the EU to leverage migration measures for foreign policy and soft power considerations, evoking Cold War images of migration being employed to discredit opposing regimes. On the one hand, by restricting visa policy for Russia, the EU conveyed a powerful message of delegitimizing the country's leadership, removing it from the EU's "trusted" partners with visa facilitation, and projecting the image of an aggressive and isolated Russia. On the other hand, by adopting temporary protection for Ukrainians, the EU signalled clear support for Ukraine, and portrayed itself as united and responsible, acting in defence of the "shared values of freedom and democracy", in an effort that can be understood as aimed at enhancing the EU's reputation and power of attraction. Ultimately, both the EU's restriction of visa policies, and its adoption of temporary protection, displayed a noticeable soft power component.

While the focus of the article has been on EU policies in the aftermath of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the argument could provide insights into other cases, both historical and contemporary. Historically, Egypt's hospitable stance towards Palestinians in the 1950s–1960s has been regarded as aiming to present Egypt as a welcoming, pro-Palestinian, and anti-Israeli state (see Tsourapas 2021), in what might be understood as an effort to amplify its soft power in the Arab world. Today, Canada's attempt to position itself as an authority and a leader on refugee resettlement (see Atak, Linley-Moore, and Kim 2023) may be interpreted as intending to boost its global standing and soft power. Migration policies, as these cases suggest, can play a pivotal role in states' foreign policy and in the projection of soft power on the global stage.

Many questions remain. Above all, considering the contrast between the generous response to Ukrainians, and the security-based approach that characterizes other EU asylum policies, to what extent is migration-related soft power perceived as such by third countries, and to what extent is it contested? Does the EU leverage its migration policy for soft power considerations when it comes to countries other than Russia too – such as in the context of humanitarian corridors from Africa and the Middle East? How does migration policy interact with other policies that are more explicitly related to soft power, such as development aid, foreign policy, or EU enlargement? Disentangling the relationship between migration, foreign policy, and soft power is key, to better understand the motivations and implications of contemporary migration policies.

Notes

1. See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine(last accessed 29/11/2023).
2. See Google Ngram Viewer, https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=migration+diplomacy&year_start=1960&year_end=2019&corpus=en–2019&smoothing=3　(last accessed 29/11/2023).
3. See https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11139345 (last accessed 29/11/2023).
4. As the above cases point to, soft power is not fully separate from hard power (Tsourapas 2018, 403). As an example, Thiollet (2011) argues that Saudi Arabia supported Eritrea in its war against Ethiopia (1962–1991) through a de-facto welcoming stance towards Eritreans, seen as "Arabs oppressed by a colonial Christian power (Ethiopia)" (Thiollet 2011,

113). Part of the goal was to defend "the Arab identity of the Red Sea" (Thiollet 2011), which one may link to soft power. At the same time, the Saudi welcoming stance also led to Eritrean refugees sending remittances back home, and thus generated a key source of income for the war (Thiollet 2011), which may in fact be closer to hard power.

5. See https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php (last accessed 29/11/2023).
6. See https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/EASO-situational%20update-safe%20country%20of%20origin-2021.pdf (last accessed 29/11/2023).
7. See https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/history-restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/ (last accessed 29/11/2023).
8. Although technically, individuals under TP are not "refugees", EU institutions often refer to Ukrainians as such. In the words of the Commission, the term is used "in a broad political sense" rather than in the legal sense (COM 2022b, 107 final). As such, in the analysis, I consider TP as a refugee policy.
9. See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/international-affairs/collaboration-countries/visa-liberalisation-moldova-ukraine-and-georgia_en (last accessed 29/11/2023).
10. Technically, individuals under TP are not "refugees". However, EU institutions often refer to Ukrainians as such. In the words of the Commission, the term is used "in a broad political sense" rather than in the legal sense (COM 2022b, 107 final).
11. Interestingly, a similar framing is used by China, as shown by Pennisi Di Floristella and Chen (this volume).

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Data access statement

This study analyzes existing data as cited in the "References" and "List of analysed documents" sections.

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20220225 FAC Main results. Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council, February 25, 2022.

20220226 VdL. Statement by President von der Leyen on Further Measures to React to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (Commission Statement).

20220227 JHA Main results. Extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council, February 27, 2022.

20220228 Informal FAC Main results. Informal Video Conference of foreign affairs (Defence) Ministers.

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20220909 Council Press Release. Council Adopts Full Suspension of Visa Facilitation with Russia.

Appendix

Council meetings analyzed:

– Special meeting of the European Council, February 24, 2022.
– Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council, February 25, 2022.
– Extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council, February 27, 2022.
– Informal video conference of foreign affairs ministers, February 27, 2022.
– Informal video conference of foreign affairs (defence) ministers, February 28, 2022.
– Justice and Home Affairs Council, March 3–4, 2022.
– Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council, March 4, 2022.
– Informal meeting of heads of state or government, Versailles, March 10–11, 2022.
– European Council, March, 24–25 2022.