Dear Friends,

Two years have now passed since the summer of 2015, during which "Fortress Europe" temporarily broke down and refugees managed to travel overland into Central Europe. At the time, many voices lauded the welcoming words and deeds German politicians and especially German civil society found in this moment of humanitarian crisis. They contrasted favorably with the violent scenes TV reports showed from the Republic of Macedonia or Hungary. Is German society therefore more human rights conscious, do people follow a less nationalist and more European identity? While a thorough answer to this question is complex and would involve a closer look at the institutions and policies involved, this edition of Germany Briefs tackles the question by revisiting the media coverage during the summer of 2015 and the following months. Christina Philipp has analyzed the leading German opinion making media using a critical discourse analysis to show that even at the height of the crisis, attitudes towards the new arrivals and opinions on migration were far more complex than meets the eye.

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Refugee Discourses and their impact on National and European Identity in Germany

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Massive migration movements due to civil war, a lack of economical perspectives and terrorism have triggered heated discussions in the German public. The admission of refugees waiting to proceed from Hungary to Western Europe in September 2015 can be considered as the starting point of an intensive debate on cultural and European identity. In the following months, large numbers of people from the Middle East entered Germany. Additionally, tens of thousands of citizens from less prosperous Balkan countries reached German soil. Being confronted with reportedly about one million asylum seekers within a few months caused strong reactions in German society. Fears regarding a loss of control of public institutions as well as harsh criticism on asylum policies served as a fertile ground for nationalists

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and opponents of the European Union. Simultaneously, however, the warm reception of the first refugees and the strong commitment of the civil population were repeatedly described to generate a positive and open-minded national self-image. Those depictions resonated with the imagination of humanitarian European values. The media coverage thus generated highly contradictory perceptions, raising questions as to how and to which extent the debate influences national and European self-understanding in Germany positively or negatively. Which self-images and which images of the other are outlined during the debate? To what extent does the media strengthen or dismantle positive self-images?

The following paper examines the effects of the reporting on national and European self-conceptions in Germany. The analyses drew on 145 articles from four major Germans newspapers, namely *Die Welt, Die Zeit, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the news magazine *Der Spiegel* during two observation periods of two weeks. Whereas the first survey period covers the primal admission of refugees in September 2015, the latter one looks at the debate following the sexual assaults and robberies on New Year's Eve in Cologne by migrants in January 2016. The material has been approached by means of a critical discourse analysis to identify relevant text passages. These were clustered regarding their impact on identity building as constructive or deconstructive for national and European identity, transforming self-conceptions or preserving persisting self-images.

A Brief History of German Refugee Discourses and National Self-Understanding

It is only recently that Germans began considering their country an immigrant society. Until 2000/2001 politicians continuously avoided to describe it as such (Hell 2005). That is very surprising given the fact that work-related migration goes back to the nineteenth century and is thus deeply interwoven with the history of the German national state. Both the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic benefited from seasonal workers from Poland as well as from other foreign nationals employed in mining, in the construction business and other industries since the 1880s. Back then, the employment of a cheap work force stimulated condescending attitudes towards foreigners. Those negative connotations were later instrumentalized by the Nazis to create resentments regarding Polish "Eastern Jews" (Terkessidis 2000). Considering the long persisting denial to use the term "country of immigration" (*Einwanderungsland*), the question arises if and to what extent negative emotions towards migrants partly maintain until today.

At the beginning of the 20th century Germany employed about one million foreigners who were expected to return to their home countries as soon as work capacities would decline. During the First World War, those tasks were turned into forced labor, thereby prohibiting the same workers to leave Germany. By 1918 the number of foreign employees increased to two million. However, since the

system ensuring forced labor was not financially beneficial in the long term, 90% of them were pressured to leave Germany until 1924. Throughout the Second World War, authorities once again compelled a huge number of foreigners to work on German soil, leading to a workforce of about 8 million forced laborers at its peak in 1944 (Terkessidis 2000).

Unlike immigration to the United States, most of the foreign nationals coming to Germany were not at any time given the opportunity, or simply were not able, to improve their social status and become a full-fledged member of the society. However, in the aftermath of the war around 12 million displaced people from Eastern countries migrated to Germany. This group did not face the same kind of resistance as other migrant groups, since they had little trouble with the German language and were therefore able to blend into society much more easily. In most cases they were offered German citizenship (Krone 2000).

When additional workers were needed in the 1960s, officials negotiated agreements with Turkey, Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and the former Yugoslavia on sending work forces to Germany. As foreign nationals in the Weimar Republic, those migrants were expected to contribute to the economy and leave as soon as their assignment ended. In accordance with this outlook, workers were placed in labor camps that left no doubt that they were not appreciated in the long run. In 1966/67 as the economic development remained static and the unemployment rate rose, a growing rejection of the foreign workers became apparent. According to most of the media coverage, migrants were associated with criminality and thought to imperil the political system, the finance system and even personal health. Furthermore, the foreign nationals were accused of taking away work opportunities and potential spouses. By 1973 around 2.6 million so-called "guest workers" made up to 12% of all work forces in Germany. Family reunifications as well as family growth added to the increasing numbers. In this context, Germany started to introduce integration policies but those policies did not improve the migrants' situation. Instead, they were meant to ensure inner security and peace and solve problems that were considered to be related to foreigners since public authorities anticipated a tendency for lingual as well as cultural problems among children of migrants that might result in criminality. Media referred to this issue as social dynamite and as a time bomb (Terkessidis 2000). Thus, foreigners were increasingly perceived as a threat to society, to cultural identity and heritage as well as to the language.

In the 1990s a large number of refugees from the Balkans and other crisis ridden countries were admitted to Germany. Media coverage persistently contributed to negative feelings towards this group of people (Hell 2005). It seemed as if asylum seekers would overrun institutions. According to the coverage, they were considered potentially dangerous and criminal in addition to their cultural alterity.

Moreover, some media put asylum seekers under general suspicion of taking advantage of the social security system (Terkessidis 2000).

In fact, a sense of threat due to the immigrants' cultural foreignness seems to have persisted in the media coverage as a relatively stable pattern over time. Given the high numbers of foreign workers and despite their crucial contribution to the economic development in Germany, it is astonishing that the negative connotations appear to be most dominant in the collective memory.

National and European Self-Perceptions in Germany today

During the post-war reconstruction, Germany allied itself to Western countries and subscribed to the idea of Western values. Following the reunification, former East Germany was compelled to conform to the political order of the West. Today, Germany holds a very strong position in the European Union illustrating the significance of the membership for German politics and its people. Germany with its 16 federal states is considered to be particularly consistent with the political system of the EU. In accordance with that, the German media often adopts a European point of view. For example, processes in the Union are described as European domestic politics instead of being described as German foreign affairs (Wiesner 2014). Consequently, one might assume, that values such as tolerance, openness and diversity, often claimed to be European, would dominate a discourse about foreigners in the present time. However, a close look at the current debate shows that the formation of national identity goes along with characteristics that are rather contradictory to European values. Moreover, European identifications play a rather subordinate role in the discourse.

Whereas the initial public debate about refugees in late 2015 also elaborated on common grounds in the European Union, the attention later shifted almost completely towards the national context. Due to the growing influx of refugees in September, questions concerning the European border system and mutual collaborations were being raised. Then, when a large number of sexual assaults and robberies by perpetrators of mostly foreign origin happened on New Year's Eve in Cologne the public focus turned to national issues. However, the analyses showed that the European Union never received as much attention in the debate as the inner-German situation did. National self-perceptions clearly prevailed the discourse. That is even true for the first period in which refugees raised issues concerning the Union as a whole. This can be understood by the share of articles that address national and/or European sentiment. Nearly all articles in both observation periods dealt with German identity. In contrast, the European Union was discussed in only about 70% of the articles in the September debate and merely in 36% of the articles in the second survey period. Also, the majority of all significant sections of text did at all times deal with national sentiment, while the amount of statements referring to the EU was in comparison much smaller or even insignificant.

The EU does not seem to be equally important as a source of identity for the German people. Research in fact demonstrates, that the EU faces a number of problems concerning its role as a common frame of identification. In comparison to the nation state, there is a much bigger distance between the associated institutions and policies and the individual lives of Europeans (Kaina 2009). Law-making processes are often opaque and citizens are only indirectly represented in the European parliament. What is more, residents of the different member states have very different and sometimes even contradictory concepts of the EU based on different notions of culture, history and the influences of their political decision makers (Glasson Deschaumes 2009). In accordance with that, the debate in 2015/16 provides insights into a rather distant and critical attitude towards the European community among Germans. The media has described the European community in terms of laws and mutual agreements, thus leaving little space for emotional attachment. For instance, the Dublin Agreement and the lack of a shared European asylum system were commonly referred to point out shortcomings and violations of European contracts:

> "Hundreds of thousands seek protection from persecution and civil war in Europe as promised by European contracts. Instead they end up in the cynical shunting yard that is the European right of asylum" (*Der Spiegel*, September 5, 2015).[2]

As common laws and agreements are perceived to be the constitutive drive of the Union, the critique undermines the emergence of a positive identification with the EU. Only very rarely did media coverage contribute to European identity by describing it as a common European culture. However, such depictions do not contribute positively to a community feeling. If anything, they create a defensive attitude towards asylum-seekers, who in turn appear to be inconsistent with this particular culture. For example, some articles argue that Europe should not host asylum seekers from Muslim cultures as they are thought to be traditional and backwards when compared to European cultural development. One author claims:

> "It was a mistake to bring uneducated workers from culturally backwards areas around the Mediterranean Sea to Europe…What is left, is a poorly educated proletariat depending on social welfare and passing on their lack of education to the second and third generation. The European Muslim migrants have experienced a return to traditional lifestyles in the 90s, resembling re-Islamization processes in Middle Eastern societies" (*Die Welt*, September 5, 2015).

Apart from that, there is little support for the imagination of a common European culture. Not only did the EU devote itself to diversity and openness, but also historical divisions, strongly varying conditions of living standards as well as cultural and lingual differences between the member states

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[2] This quotation and all subsequent ones were translated by the author.

make this idea obsolete. The description of common European values might serve as a connecting element instead. However, media coverage indicates that the EU's approach to the crisis has been perceived as incompatible with those values. In this context, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* accused the EU of "high treason against the values the European Union was founded for" (September 7, 2015). Journalists very often condemn the reaction of the European institutions as belated, inappropriate and question solidarity between the member states.

> "If there is a 'refugee crisis', it is not about being unable to host these people, but about the scandalous lack of empathy… Right now, all the talk about freedom, about a Europe without borders and a Christian understanding of human beings is worth nothing" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 4, 2009).

Nevertheless, harsh criticism might also be an indicator for the importance of the EU for German people. Germans seem to have a very clear idea of the EU and a positive identification appears to be desirable to them.

With regard to national identity, critique has a large share of the debate as well. Following the attacks on the New Year's Eve, the self-image increasingly drew on negative self-descriptions. Whereas 55% of the articles in the first observation period expressed the dominance of a positive national self-image, this was only true for 20% of the coverage in January. During the second survey period, about 32% of all significant text passages aimed at dismantling identity feelings, most of them relating to national concepts, since the EU was barely mentioned. Thus, depictions generating deconstructive feelings entered the debate more frequently and exerted a negative impact on the national self-image. Uncontrolled and illegal immigration were perceived to be obstacles threatening future security and prosperity. This caused a feeling of dealing with issues that had gone out of control. Public institutions as well as politicians appeared to be unable to manage the huge numbers of refugees. In the aftermath of the New Year's Eve one *Der Spiegel* article claims:

> "What now? … It is part of the truth that politicians talk about integration, but they do not point out the challenges and major quests and accept the corresponding consequences. It is also part of the truth that living together in Germany will become less comfortable" (*Der Spiegel*, January 9, 2016).

Some media coverage did contribute positively to the national self-perception. For this purpose, the strong commitment of the civic population was described in detail. The images of the first refugees' arrival in Munich, received by a high number of volunteers, generated favorable national feelings. In the following weeks, the ongoing commitment was persistently praised by the media. Germans clearly took pride in their reaction to the crisis. It was considered to resonate with human rights and other values, such as openness, all of which are associated with the European Union. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* pointed out that the reception of refugees at Munich central station by the Germans "sets an example…plenty of

committed people turned the destiny of thousands of Syrian refugees to good account" (September 7, 2015).

In this context, journalists very often drew on positive depictions in the foreign press as a source of external confirmation for those favorable national feelings. For example, *Die Welt* refers to the Italian writer Claudio Magris, describing the scenes in Munich with the words: "Once there was a nightmare of a German Europe, that has now been replaced by the comforting reality of a European Germany" (September 14, 2015).

Thus, moral concepts deriving from the EU are highly relevant for positive German self-perceptions. Besides that, the debate outlined positive national elements, which work in favor of a positive German self-image. For example, the media frequently referred to the social system, the healthcare and the economic strength as characteristics of Germany that positively distinguish it from other countries. Likewise, Germany's pro-active approach when facing the so-called "crisis" was often emphasized. In contrast, economically weaker European regions and countries such as the Balkans, Italy and Greece appeared rather passive:

> "No matter if it is a poor country, such as Bulgaria or a rich one, such as Italy, a minimum standard for dealing with asylum seekers has never been applied consequently all over Europe. In Germany, refugees receive financial support, language courses, accommodation. In Italy, after all the fourth biggest economy in the EU, they get none of these things" (*Der Spiegel*, September 5, 2015).

Other European countries' struggle with the refugee influx was perceived as an inability to manage the situation properly. Consequently, the media repeatedly stated that Germany could not send refugees back to Hungary or Italy since those countries could not meet the basic requirements for a humane treatment. Germany, by contrast, did not only appear more powerful but also seemed to have moral superiority.

Thus, distinguishing Germany positively from other countries is a very dominant mechanism in the debate that goes along with a favorable self-perception. Likewise, the media coverage focused on the perpetrators' cultures of origin in the course of New Year's Eve and frequently implied that the corresponding cultures were inseparable from the attacks. The cultural background was thought to be explanatory for a disposition for violence and misogyny, thereby making it seem as if these issues were specifically related to other cultures. As a side effect, they covered up potential aggressive tendencies among Germans by locating them in a foreign culture. In many cases, such analyses were presented by quotes and third persons. However, those statements were seldom clearly refuted or disapproved. One authors outlines:

> "Some say, foreigners, especially Muslims, cannot be integrated into German society for religious, cultural and genetic reasons. However, you do not have to be a fanatic to realize, that you need to restrict the quantitative amount of migrants to integrate them" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, January 10, 2016).

Not only does the writer fail to contradict the above mentioned point of view, he then adds to cultural stereotypes by warning, "Traditional images of masculinity based on devaluation of women shall never be allowed to be part of our society again" (ibid.).

Clearly, a positive self-image and a negative image of the other mutually depend on one another. Media coverage adds to national identity by presenting Germany in a positive way or implying a cultural superiority. In doing so other civilizations are being devaluated. It must be said however, that many authors showed an awareness for speech acts being discriminative in nature and therefore refused a self-definition based on race, language and religion. In this regard, they differentiated between refugees and the perpetrators. Nevertheless, the implied link between Muslim cultures and the assaults negatively affects the perception of asylum seekers and contributes to antagonistic feelings towards them.

Main findings

Many arguments criticizing the admittance of refugees resemble earlier debates. According to the coverage, officials seemed to have lost control. High financial expenses and a lack of accommodation appeared to be increasingly unmanageable. In order to illustrate the large numbers of people entering Germany, the debate drew on language that is usually used to describe natural catastrophes, thereby further adding to a feeling of being overrun by foreigners. Journalists sometimes used vocabulary implying a disposition for criminality and underlining their illegality, hence they generated negative associations. Furthermore, an expected lack of education among asylum seekers was frequently described as an obstacle for integrating them into the job market. As in earlier times, the media created antagonistic feelings towards refugees. Speech acts of this kind maintain the national identity since they draw clear distinctions between Germans and migrants and protect a cultural identity from the influence of foreign elements. They have the biggest share in the debate. Obviously, those patterns of perception have endured over time and have not been fully overcome yet even though there is a growing awareness for cultural discrimination in the discourse.

The European Union does not serve as a source of identity to the same extent as the national one. Yet, values associated with it seem highly desirable for Germans and might add to a more positive self-understanding that does not base itself on cultural differentiations. A closer look at the debate reveals that positive national self-images strongly rely on the fulfillment of moral ideals. Those values clearly emphasize human rights, cultural openness and they contradict assessments based on culture, religion

or ethnicity. However, describing and thereby constituting clear boundaries towards the refugees' cultures of origin and other EU member states is what identity building in this debate has very often done and continues to do.

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