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Leveraging the European Refugee Crisis: Forced Displacement and Bargaining in Greece's Bailout Negotiations

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Abstract

How does forced migration feature in EU member states' foreign policy and how does it affect their bargaining strategies? While the literature highlights EU-level policies aiming to manage forced migration flows, we examine how Greece sought to leverage its response to the 2015–16 European migrant crisis. We propose a theoretical framework that explains why the SYRIZA–ANEL government sought to leverage Greece's position as a refugee-host state via an issue-linkage strategy tying the management of forced migration to economic aid over the Third Economic Adjustment Programme. Initially employing a 'blackmailing' strategy focused on threats, Greece shifted to a 'backscratching' strategy of co-operation after March 2016, once its geopolitical importance and numbers of asylum seekers within its territory were reduced. We provide the first detailed analysis of Greece's foreign policy response to the European migrant crisis, demonstrating the importance of forced displacement in the international politics of EU member states.

Keywords: forced migration; issue linkage; Greek refugee policy; migration; European migration crisis

Introduction

'We cannot keep ISIS out, if the EU keeps bullying us.'

Greek Defence Minister Panayiotis Kammenos (Carassava and Aldrick, 2015).

One of the gravest consequences of the Syrian Civil War has been the creation of 5.6 million forced migrants (in addition to 6 million internally displaced persons), who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries since 2011. This has significantly affected the EU and its individual member states: Germany currently constitutes the fourth largest host state of forcibly displaced Syrians, with roughly 700,000 refugees, while hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers are scattered in countries across Europe (UNHCR, 2021). Brussels spent over €17.7bn in 2015–17 alone aiming to cope with the 'European migrant crisis' (European Commission, 2018). At the same time, forced migration has generated significant tensions in intra-EU relations, both with regard to individual EU member states' policymaking, as in Hungary or Poland (Csehi and Zgut, 2021), as well as within the context of European migration governance (Geddes, 2019; Niemann and Zaun, 2018). Despite this phenomenon's importance, research on EU engagement with forced migration has yet to fully account for refugees' role in European host-states' foreign policy agendas. In this article, we aim to expand upon existing understandings of the interplay between forced migration and EU member states' bargaining strategies within the context of the 2015–16 European migrant crisis. We focus on Greece, an EU

member state particularly affected by forced migration, in order to examine the specific strategies developed by national policymakers in the 2015–19 period and to address the theoretical lacuna on how refugee flows may affect intra-EU bargaining processes.

We argue that an EU member state is able to leverage its position as a refugee host state via issue-linkage strategies that tie forced migration to other policy agendas, within and/or outside core EU competences, in two ways: a refugee host state may either develop *blackmailing* or *backscratching* strategies that rely on coercion or co-operation, respectively, in order to attract payoffs from non-host states. In previous work, we have identified how a refugee host state in the Global South tends to develop *blackmailing* strategies if it contains a large number of refugees and national elites perceive of the country as being geopolitical important vis-à-vis the target state(s); in the absence of either of these conditions, elites are more likely to develop *backscratching* strategies (Tsourapas, 2019). We test this hypothesis in the European context via the single-case study of Greece during the January 2015–July 2019 period. We focus on the strategies of the Coalition of the Radical Left–Progressive Alliance [SYRIZA] government, headed by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, in coalition with the right-wing Independent Greeks [ANEL] party. SYRIZA–ANEL led the negotiations with European creditors over the 2015 Third Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece, the so-called third bailout package, while engaging in issue-linkage strategies that tied interstate bargaining over economic aid with Greece's management of asylum seekers.

We argue that Greece adopted an issue-linkage strategy that relied, firstly, on *blackmailing* and, secondly, on *backscratching* over two time periods. Initially, between January 2015 and March 2016, SYRIZA–ANEL was able to pursue a coercive foreign policy strategy of blackmailing based on threats. This was due to the country's strategic geopolitical position vis-à-vis the EU: Greece served as the initial point of the 'Balkan corridor', while transfers of asylum seekers to Greece under the Dublin Regulation had been suspended, further strengthening the country's position as a 'transit' rather than a 'host' state. The use of threats also relied on the presence of a significant number of asylum seekers within Greek territory. However, from March 2016 onwards, the Greek government shifted to a non-coercive bargaining approach via backscratching, which sought to secure economic payoffs based on co-operation. This shift was necessitated by the diminished geopolitical importance of the country vis-à-vis the EU: implementation of the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement led to a dramatic decrease of refugee inflows, while the closure of the Balkan corridor and the resumption of Dublin transfers effectively transformed Greece into a migrant-host state.

The article is structured as follows: an initial review of the relevant literature identifies a gap in how EU member states employ forced migration in their foreign policymaking. A discussion of the article's methodology is followed by a contextualization of the Greek political context and the country's pre-2015 approach towards managing forced migration, which underlines the significant post-2015 policy shift away from securitization once the SYRIZA–ANEL government came to power. We proceed to analyse how SYRIZA–ANEL adopted an issue-linkage strategy, which was aimed at leveraging the country's position as a refugee host state in order to secure European economic payoffs, by *blackmailing* when certain conditions allowed policymakers to do so before shifting to a strategy of *backscratching* when these conditions were no longer present. We conclude with a discussion on how this theoretical framework allows for a more nuanced

understanding EU member states' use of forced migration in their foreign policymaking and paves the way for further research on the international politics of refugee management.

I. The International Politics of Forced Migration

How do refugee flows affect the bargaining strategies of European host states? A long line of international relations scholars has attempted to address these questions, albeit not systematically. As Betts argues, 'only relatively isolated pockets of theoretically informed literature have emerged on the international politics of forced migration', while the study of refugee politics has yet to form part of mainstream international relations (Betts, 2011, pp. 12–13). Researchers have identified the growing reluctance of states across the Global North to host refugees (Hamlin, 2021; Kent, 2021), particularly in the context of a dysfunctional global refugee regime (Hollifield, 2012; Micinski, 2021). The literature has also pinpointed an increasing trend towards the outsourcing of forced migration, as 'states have a legal obligation to support refugees on their own territory, [but] they have no legal obligation to support refugees on the territory of other states' (Betts, 2011, p. 19). In the context of EU member states' bargaining strategies, scholars have argued that smaller states face a range of disadvantages in promoting their agendas, which is linked to their limited bargaining power (Panke, 2010), but without making specific reference to the management of forced migration, save from work on burden sharing and refugee quota systems (Thielemann, 2018; Zaun, 2018).

Both the EU and individual EU member states have long attempted to prevent asylum seekers' entry into their territory via a number of ways (FitzGerald, 2019). For historical and structural reasons, countries outside Europe and North America host the large majority of global refugee populations, which amplifies power asymmetries with seemingly unaffected Western states (Pécoud, 2021). At the same time, efforts to securitize immigration across Europe led both Brussels and national governments to adopt a range of strategies in their negotiations with host states of first asylum across their periphery, particularly within the auspices of EU migration governance (Geddes and Hadj-Abdou, 2018; Missbach and Phillips, 2020). These range from stricter asylum laws and border patrols (Andreas and Snyder, 2000; Geddes and Scholten, 2016) or selective visa policies (Laube, 2019) to offering material support to third states willing to contain migrant and refugee populations within their borders (Bøås, 2021; Youngs and Zihnioğlu, 2021). The latter form part of broader processes of 'refugee commodification' in international politics (Freier *et al.*, 2021).

As a result, security studies scholars identify how the bargaining strategies of refugee host states towards the EU have developed accordingly. On the one hand, interstate co-operation may occur via 'win-win' strategies: 'in the absence of altruistic commitment by Northern states to support refugees in the South, issue-linkage has been integral in achieving international cooperation on refugees' (Betts, 2011, p. 20; see also: Arar, 2017; Adam *et al.*, 2020). On the other hand, refugee host states may also utilise coercion: they may employ deportation in order to create targeted refugee 'crises' in target countries that, in fear of being 'capacity-swamped', become more likely to comply with these states' demands (Greenhill, 2010; see also: Tsourapas, 2021; Aras, 2019). Although Greenhill's framework places 'coercive engineered migration' at the heart of refugee host states'

strategies, she does not provide a full gamut of states' foreign policy options. Beyond coercion, what is the range of strategies available to states affected by forced displacement? Under what conditions do refugee host states choose one specific policy option over others?

The argument that refugee host states may seek economic payoffs from the presence of displaced communities within their borders is not novel. Recent research has identified ongoing processes of states using migrants and refugees in their migration diplomacy strategies (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019; Norman, 2020). For Adamson and Tsourapas (2020), the monetization of migration flows is an integral component of neoliberal migration states' foreign policymaking. However, this line of work typically examines interstate bargaining on as occurring between richer donor states of the Global North and poorer recipient states of the Global South, via mutually beneficial 'bargains', 'compacts', or 'deals'. Northern states offer payoffs, most often in the form of development assistance aid, to Southern states in exchange for their continuing to host refugee communities within their borders (Betts, 2021). But are Northern states also able to seek such payoffs and, if so, how?

A recent approach has employed two key terms from the international relations literature on interdependence in order to understand the range of strategies that may be employed by host states operating in the context of asymmetric power relations: *blackmailing* and *backscratching*, broadly corresponding to coercive/zero-sum and co-operative/positive-sum strategies, respectively (Oye, 1979; Keohane and Nye, 1987, p. 197; on the application of this framework to forced displacement, see Tsourapas, 2019). In the Middle East, refugee host states like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey choose their strategy based on the size of their refugee community and domestic elites' perception of their country's geostrategic importance. If they hold significant populations of refugees and perceive of themselves as important, as in the case of Turkey, they are more likely to *blackmail*, namely threatening to flood the target state with refugee populations within their borders, unless compensated. If not, as in the case of Jordan and Lebanon, they employ *backscratching*, namely promising to refrain from taking unilateral action against refugee populations within their borders, if compensated.

Yet, two questions remain: to what extent is such a rationalist framework applicable in the context of EU politics? The context of European states' intra-EU bargaining strategies has highlighted the prominence of *issue-linkage strategies* (McKibben, 2010), namely the connection of diverse issues in order to obtain additional leverage in interstate negotiations characterised by complex interdependence (Haas, 1980). Despite a voluminous literature on the importance of migration in European external relations and negotiations with third states, the use of issue-linkage strategies in intra-EU negotiations on the management of migrants and refugees remains underexplored. In the context of post-2009 Greek bailout negotiations, the matter of forced migration has yet to be analysed (Hennessy, 2017; Zahariadis, 2017).

In this article, we seek to address this gap via an examination of Greek issue-linkage strategies during the 2015–16 European migrant crisis and the negotiations around European economic aid offered. We test the blackmailing/backscratching framework in the context of Greece–EU negotiations. As per the theoretical framework explained above, we expect that blackmailing will only occur when the host country contains a high number of asylum seekers *as well as* an inflated sense of geostrategic importance. Both

conditions must be present for blackmailing to be adopted. If only one condition is present, the host state is more likely to engage in backscratching.

II. Methodology and Case Selection

In order to substantiate theoretically informed claims on how forced migration features in EU member states' issue-linkage bargaining strategies, we examine the evolution of Greece's policy towards irregular migration before, during, and after the 2015–16 migrant crisis. Greece is selected as an explorative 'extreme/deviant' case study (Seawright and Gerring, 2008), given its status as a front-line EU transit state as well as one of the countries most severely affected by forced displacement. Concurrently, since 2009, Greece has been grappling with one of the most severe economic crises in Europe, which frequently put it at odds with Brussels (Afonso *et al.*, 2015; Zartaloudis, 2014). An anti-austerity and anti-systemic government was elected in 2015, which promised to 'renegotiate' the status quo between Greece and its European partners (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2019). Taking this into account, a combination of contextual reasons were present in the Greek case, which made the adoption of a maverick foreign policy that went beyond the standard practice of consensus in intra-EU relations both plausible and realistic (Heisenberg, 2005; Tselibis, 2013). In terms of refugee politics, this novel turn in Greek foreign policy provided fertile ground for the application of issue-linkage strategies.

We limit our analysis to the rule of the SYRIZA–ANEL coalition government, in power between January 2015 and July 2019 for a number of reasons. Firstly, SYRIZA–ANEL was responsible for leading the negotiations on Greece's third bailout package. At the same time, the coalition government's time in power coincided with the peak of the European migrant crisis. Finally, the SYRIZA–ANEL coalition government put forth a distinctly less restrictive refugee policy, marking a sharp difference with both pre-2015 and post-2019 national policy. Our data collection strategy relied on primary and secondary data available in English and Greek. This includes national and EU-level documents relating to Greek migration and asylum policies, primary accounts of negotiations around Greece's third bailout programme, as well as statements of government officials and policymakers made in national and international press outlets as part of our investigation regarding the continuity and change of the handling of the 2015–16 migrant crisis. We triangulate these findings with secondary evidence collected from the academic literature and relevant policy reports.

III. Greece, Forced Migration, and the European Migrant Crisis

For much of its modern history, Greece has been a country of emigration (Fakiolas and King, 1996), which partly explains the absence of a formal immigration policy until the early 1990s. The post-Cold War collapse of the Communist regime in neighbouring Albania, followed by an influx of hundreds of thousands of Albanians and ethnic Greeks, led to the 1991 adoption of the country's first main law focusing on migrant arrests and deportations (Triandafyllidou, 2009). Although Greece would transpose a number of EU directives regarding the management of asylum seekers, their implementation was poor and restrictive (Triandafyllidou, 2014). Greece gradually developed a limited, albeit draconian and securitized, asylum policy which made the country one of the least

welcoming EU states to asylum seekers (Karyotis, 2012). Greek asylum policy also caused significant problems in the administration of the EU's 2010 Common European Asylum System, as the country did not meet basic requirements across a number of fronts: Greece repeatedly failed to register all new arrivals, it did not provide humane shelter to asylum seekers, while the processing of applications remained cumbersome and inefficient (Papadimitriou and Zartaloudis, 2020).

As a result, in January 2011, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the country was violating asylum seekers' human rights and that EU member states should temporarily halt any returns of asylum seekers to Greece as per the Dublin Regulation (Vogel, 2011). Greece remained responsible for processing applications of asylum seekers arriving in its territory, but a key pillar of the Dublin Regulation, aimed at preventing 'asylum shopping', was suspended. EU member states no longer had the right to transfer back to Greece those asylum seekers who had applied for asylum in that country, or for whom Greece was the first country of entry to the EU. This implied that Greece theoretically received a *carte blanche* to wave asylum seekers through its territory. It bears noting that the suspension was temporary and could be revoked at any time, as the country remained *de jure* responsible for implementing the stipulations of the Dublin Regulation.

Successive governments during the 2011–15 period treated the suspension of Dublin transfers as a source of international embarrassment at the country's failure to implement European regulations. As a result, Greek policymakers shifted towards closer co-operation with the EU on matters of migration, while strengthening an already highly securitized refugee policy (Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2016; Dimitriadi, 2017, pp. 91–116; Stivas, 2021). This included the creation of Migrant Detention Centres, in Amygdaleza and elsewhere, the construction of a wall barrier along the Evros river on the land border with Turkey, and the introduction of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programmes (Nestoras, 2015). However, government officials had not perceived the bargaining opportunity that the suspension of Dublin transfers created. The fact that Greece was (temporarily) not bound by Dublin returns meant that it no longer constituted a *host* state of migrant and refugee communities unable to seek asylum anywhere else in Europe; rather, it was transformed into a *transit* state that could allow migrants to continue their journey towards other European destinations. In effect, the suspension of 'Dublin returns' produced the unintended consequence of augmenting Greece's geopolitical importance, particularly in light of the emerging migrant crisis across the Mediterranean. But no Greek government had yet attempted to use this as a negotiating strategy. At least not until the massive influx of asylum seekers into the country in the context of the 2015–16 European migrant crisis, and the rise of the SYRIZA–ANEL coalition to power in January 2015.

Blackmailing under the SYRIZA–ANEL Coalition Government

In January 2015, Greece witnessed a dramatic change in its domestic politics: the far-left party of SYRIZA was able to form a coalition government with the far-right populist nationalist party of Independent Greeks (ANEL), as part of an anti-austerity platform. The SYRIZA–ANEL government also tried to alter the country's immigration and refugee policy (see Avgi, 2013). As opposition, key SYRIZA figures had condemned

the construction of Migrant Detention Centres, which they called 'concentration camps', vowing to reverse all measures about detainment and repatriation, and to introduce a regular, transparent, and relatively speedy process of regularisation of all asylum seekers (SYRIZA, 2014). Moreover, SYRIZA had long favoured the reversal of Greece's migration policy from pre-2015 deterrence to the facilitation of irregular migrant flows from Greece to Northern Macedonia, via the 'Balkan corridor', which led to Central and West European countries. In order to do this, SYRIZA had proposed that Greece should fully withdraw from the Dublin Regulation in order to 'unshackle the trapped refugees and migrants who do not want to stay in Greece' (SYRIZA, 2014).

Beyond a massive shift in domestic politics, the country would experience a dramatic increase of asylum seekers from 2014 onwards. Some had already fled the Syrian Civil War in 2011–12, but many more arrived to Greece in 2015–16, particularly as a result of the harsh conditions they encountered in Syria's neighbouring countries, namely Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. As the crisis intensified, Middle East states became increasingly unwilling to host additional refugees, leading to further flows towards Europe. In fact, many Western donors had already diminished their contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the body responsible for running Syrian refugee camps, which then led to the deterioration of conditions within refugee camps. The monumental scale of irregular migrant arrivals in Greece in 2015 is undisputed. A country of fewer than 11 million people hosted over one million asylum seekers in 2015. The vast majority of these populations made their way into Greece via Turkey in

Table 1: Illegal Border Crossings into the EU 2009–19

<i>Year</i>	<i>Eastern Mediterranean Route (Greece)</i>	<i>Total</i>
2009	39,975 (65%)	61,260
2010	55,688 84%	66,383
2011	57,000 43%	131,100
2012	37,200 61%	60,500
2013	24,800 32%	78,700
2014	50,800 22%	230,800
2015	885,400 84%	1,049,400
2016	182,277 36%	511,146
2017	42,319 21%	204,750
2018	56,561 38%	150,114

Source: For all years until 2015: European Stability Initiative, 2017; for following years: FRONTEX, 2019. Authors' calculations on percentages for years 2016–18.

numbers far greater than anything encountered by pre-2015 Greek governments (see Table 1).

In late January 2015, as the refugee crisis intensified, the SYRIZA–ANEL government engaged in a paradigmatic shift of Greek refugee policy towards a less restrictive and punitive stance regarding irregular migration, true to Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ pre-election rhetoric. In February 2015, the government announced the closure of the Amygdaleza detention centre and released most of its detainees, who were granted a six-month residence permit and free transfer to Athens (Nestoras, 2015). Moreover, the government reversed the 18-month detention period, which the previous government had introduced, by reducing it to 6 months. This shift in the management of forced migration tied into the SYRIZA–ANEL’s broader anti-European rhetoric, as the Greek government sought to contrast its ‘compassionate’ approach to irregular migration with the ‘inhumane’ strategies adopted by Brussels and EU member states. This development also fit into the SYRIZA–ANEL’s open-border narrative of the time (Harteveld *et al.*, 2018).

Within a few weeks of his election, Tsipras argued that ‘refugees see Europe as being in a state of meltdown,’ and that centre-left forces across the continent should tear down ‘the walls of shame built by far-right parties that were strengthened after European austerity policies’ (The Press Project, 2016). He also argued that images of drowned children were a ‘punch at Europe’s stomach’ and that ‘the lives of these people test our humanitarian values and traditions’ (News 24/7, 2015). Facing the accusation that Greece had, in effect, abandoned all border controls, the Greek Prime Minister famously wondered: ‘Which borders are open? Does the sea have borders?’ (Proto Thema, 2015). SYRIZA–ANEL refused to heed European and domestic opposition calls for stronger border controls, arguing that such restrictions so would ‘convert the Aegean Sea into a liquid grave of thousands of children, like Aylan [Kurdi]’ (Proto Thema, 2015). Following the end of her tenure as Deputy Minister for Immigration Policy, Tasia Christodouloupoulou stated that the January–July 2015 era was:

‘the best time for the refugee crisis ... All the European states had their borders open, and that is why Greece was not burdened by my policy ... I would repeat that I could not be happier than when I allowed one million refugees to legally enter Europe during my time [at the Ministry] (Dimitrolopoulos, 2020).

Gradually, the management of irregular migrants in Greece began to develop as a key pillar of the coalition government’s foreign policy agenda at the time, as part of a broader *blackmailing* strategy vis-à-vis European creditors. As per the expectations of the article’s theoretical framework, a refugee host state is likely to attempt blackmail if it believes it possesses a sizeable number of refugees and it is geostrategically important. The refugee influx into Europe over the first half of 2015 had already been the largest experienced since the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Between January and July 2015, Frontex documented an astonishing 663 per cent increase of irregular border crossings into the Western Balkans compared to the previous year (Nestoras, 2015). In terms of geostrategic importance, SYRIZA–ANEL were aware of the country’s importance as the initial point of the “Balkan corridor” and the fact that transfers of asylum seekers to Greece under the Dublin Regulation had been suspended. It is difficult to overemphasize the extent to

which the (mis)perception of Greece's geostrategic importance featured in SYRIZA–ANEL's approach towards the EU at the time. Across government circles, it was widely believed that Greece's creditors would not allow the country to default. As Minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis would often assert, Greece 'held all the cards' (for an in-depth examination, see Dendrinou and Varvitsiotti, 2019).

The SYRIZA–ANEL government's attempt at issue linkage via blackmail focused on the ongoing negotiations on the review of the country's Second Economic Adjustment Programme. The programme had been agreed in 2012 between Greece, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. A 2015 review was necessary in order for a third bailout programme to be considered. Greece sought to use the review process as an opportunity to ensure better bailout terms, given its position as a major European refugee host state. Before an informal Foreign Ministers meeting on 6–7 March in Riga, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikos Kotzias declared that the Greek state would collapse if not adequately supported via a favourable bailout package. If that were to occur, 'there will be tens of millions of immigrants and thousands of jihadists' that would find their way to other EU countries (Waterfield, 2015). This threat was repeated by other key members of the SYRIZA–ANEL government. Two days later, the government's junior coalition partner and leader of the ANEL party, Panayiotis Kammenos, stated that Kotzias' declaration described governmental strategy perfectly. In fact, Kammenos, who also held the post of Minister of Defence, argued that:

'if they [EU creditors] strike us, we will strike them. We will give documents to migrants coming from anywhere in order to travel in the Schengen area, so that this human wave could go straight to Berlin' (Meehall-Wood, 2015).

A similar statement was made by a crucial member of the government, the deputy interior minister, Yiannis Panousis, who was directly responsible for dealing with the Greek border and the irregular migration crisis. Panousis raised the prospect of sending 300,000 to 500,000 migrants into the rest of Europe, if Greece was not offered additional EU funding (Meehall-Wood, 2015). The extent to which Greece's geostrategic position enabled such a strategy became clear in an interview Kammenos gave to *Bild*, a German tabloid newspaper, where he warned that a potential expulsion of Greece from the Eurozone would mean that the country would no longer abide by EU-wide accords, including the Dublin Regulation. In his own words: 'in that scenario, any agreements will have no value, there will be no treaties, nothing. We will not be obliged to keep refugees as a host country. Whoever wants to lead us out of the Euro zone should be aware of this' (Newspost, 2015). In a separate interview, Kammenos declared that Greece needed leniency. Otherwise, the SYRIZA–ANEL government 'would suspend the Dublin II agreement immediately' (THETOC, 2015).

Beyond such increasingly aggressive rhetoric, SYRIZA–ANEL implemented specific policy shifts in order to exert pressure on Brussels and other EU member states. In the first half of 2015, Greece introduced new, short-term 30-day permits for all new arrivals into Greece, which was a major shift from pre-2015 policies of deterrence and expulsion. Now, any new arrivals would not be arrested and detained on sight, unless their short-term permit of 30 days had expired (THETOC, 2015). By March 2015, national

media published a leaked Ministry of Interior memorandum directing the police neither to arrest nor to detain any irregular migrant (Nestoras, 2015). With the number of asylum seekers in Athens rising rapidly, local authorities launched formal complaints about their impact on the Greek capital, which were duly dismissed by government ministers. The government's use of refugees as an instrument of pressure against Europe, in particular Germany, was well understood by international observers and local law enforcement officers: 'the whole system seems to be organised to register migrants and let them leave,' argued a European Commission team conducting checks on Evros and Greek islands. A Greek police officer serving at the Moria refugee camp put it even more succinctly, as he explained that his job entailed copying asylum seekers' IDs and fingerprints before waving them off on their way Germany. His job could be summed up in three words: 'copy, finger, Merkel' (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017).

The government's understanding of the negotiating power of Greece as a refugee-transit country rather than a host state was confirmed by the Minister of State and close confidant of the Prime Minister, Alekos Flambouraris, who argued that the European migrant crisis can only be resolved by issuing Greek passports for all irregular migrants, so that they could travel to Western Europe (Newsbomb, 2015). A wide consensus at the time across political, media, and NGO circles was that the coalition government's policy was to enable the entry of irregular migrants into Greece and to ensure that they avoid arrest or detention over a 30-day period as they make arrangement for their transit to Western Europe. Opposition parties accused the government of attempting to facilitate irregular migrants' transit from border areas via free one-way bus or boat tickets to Athens (Takis, 2015). This *laissez faire, laissez passer* strategy was confirmed by Christodouloupoulou. When asked to take action against a rapidly deteriorating public health and security situation in Athens, as thousands of irregular migrants began occupying public spaces, she argued that they were merely 'sunbathing' (Kathimerini, 2015). North Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki openly accused the Greek government of 'putting people in tents near the Macedonian border as a way of applying pressure' (Balkan Insight, 2016), while Gjorge Ivanov, the country's President, warned that North Macedonia is 'protecting Europe from a European country that is insufficiently controlling the refugees or has simply sent them on' (Das Bild, 2016).

Although the minutes of EU bailout negotiations have not been released, we know that Greece's strategic importance as a refugee host state was mentioned multiple times in official discussion between the government and its international creditors (Dendrinou and Varvitsioti, 2019). At the same time, independent observers accused Tsipras of turning refugees into 'pawns in his negotiations with other Eurozone countries on Greece's bailout,' and lambasted Greece's 'cynical use of refugees' as 'shameful' (Dempsey, 2015). One of the SYRIZA-ANEL government's fiercest critics was Austrian Foreign Affairs Minister Sebastian Kurz, who considered Greece responsible for the migrant crisis. Visiting the Greek-North Macedonia border, Kurz argued that 'it is not just a case of Greece not processing those (asylum) claims, but they are actively doing their very best to get the refugees to move on to central Europe as soon as possible' (Reuters, 2015a). Another source of criticism, perhaps unsurprisingly, came from Greece's domestic opposition. Ex-Premier Samaras accused Tsipras of opening Greece's borders in 2015 and inviting all 'illegal immigrants' to pass via Greece to Europe

(Iefimerida, 2016). Similarly, former deputy Premier Venizelos called attempting to link the refugee issue with Greece's bailout negotiations a 'catastrophic mistake' (Naftemporiki, 2016).

Backscratching under the SYRIZA–ANEL Coalition Government

The SYRIZA–ANEL coalition government's initial strategy of blackmailing was unsuccessful, as Greece agreed to a Third Economic Adjustment Programme in July 2015. Although an analysis of the conditions under which issue-linkage strategies are successful would be beyond the scope of this article, the post-2015 period offers significant insights into the determinants of Greece's use of asylum seekers in its foreign policymaking. Despite winning the snap September 2015 elections called after a group of SYRIZA MPs left the party, the second SYRIZA–ANEL government had already suffered a major defeat in terms of their initial aim of reversing austerity. Instead, Tsipras was about to implement another harsh wave of economic austerity. The strategy of linking the massive numbers of irregular migrants and the role of Greece in deterring their movement towards northern Europe in return for easing of austerity or a new/renegotiated deal for Greece failed dramatically in the summer of 2015.

However, the September 2015 government (another SYRIZA–ANEL coalition) did not alter its policy vis-à-vis irregular migration. As new arrivals continued coming in through the country's eastern border with Turkey and transiting through its northern borders with North Macedonia and Albania, the SYRIZA–ANEL government continued its belligerent rhetoric in the hope of securing external economic payoffs. As late as December 2015, Tsipras would continue targeting the EU and individual EU member states for their approach to the crisis via threatening discourse, even asserting that 'if the Europeans want us to kill or carry the bodies of refugees then they should say so openly' (Newsbeast, 2015). Interestingly, this stance mirrors the rhetorical approach of another refugee host state that sought EU economic payoffs at the same time, Turkey. In February 2016, for instance, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared to EU officials that 'we can open the doors to Greece and Bulgaria anytime and we can put the refugees on buses ... so how will you deal with refugees if you don't get a deal? Kill the refugees?' (Tsourapas, 2019).

Yet, three developments undercut the Greek strategy of blackmailing via 'waving through' irregular migrants from Turkey towards Western Europe via the Balkan corridor. Firstly, the EU concluded an agreement with Turkey, according to which the latter would maintain refugees within its territory and agree to accept anyone intercepted attempting to cross the Turkish/Greek border without approval. Partly in response to Turkish President's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's coercive migration diplomacy vis-à-vis Europe, EU leaders negotiated a Joint Action Plan and a €3 billion package in late 2015, followed by the March 2016 'EU–Turkey Statement', which promised another €3 billion in payoffs, if Turkey agreed to a readmission of Syrians arriving in Greece and an imposition of tighter border controls (Muftuler-Bac, 2020). In effect, the outflow of refugees via the Aegean Sea into Greece and, subsequently, the rest of Europe, ceased in the aftermath of signing the EU–Turkey Statement. In terms of this article's theoretical expectations, this development undercut a key dimension of Greece's leverage standing, stripping it of its status as a major host state of asylum seekers.

At the same time, Austria reached an agreement with a number of Western Balkan countries aimed at securing border controls and blocking irregular migrant flows. As discussed above, Kurz did not have much sympathy for Greece and sought to co-operate more closely with the countries of the so-called ‘Balkan corridor’, instead. As he stated, Western Balkan countries had been ‘overrun, overwhelmed and have been left to their own devices ... we have to help them.’ In October 2015, a meeting involving 11 countries was held at German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s request in which Greece was put on the spot. The joint statement stressed that policies of ‘waving through refugees’ must stop (Reuters, 2015b). In February 2016, Kurz claimed that Greece was not ready to reduce the migration flow as ‘the interest on the Greek side is only in transporting refugees as quickly as possible towards central Europe’ (Reuters, 2015c). Within Greece, opposition parties also accused the coalition government of linking the European migrant crisis with the bailout negotiations, arguing that it had been ‘a desperate solution,’ which had effectively ‘pushed Europe’s borders from the Aegean Sea to North Macedonia’ (Naftemporiki, 2016). In any case, by March 2016, North Macedonia, Croatia, and Slovenia had announced formal border closures. This led to thousands of irregular migrants becoming ‘stuck’ in Greece (Kingsley, 2016), duly undercutting Greece’s strategic position as a migrant-transit country and, ultimately, depriving SYRIZA–ANEL of another form of leverage.

Finally, in April 2016, the European Commission found that the country ‘has significantly increased its overall reception capacity’ and that ‘significant progress had been achieved by Greece in putting in place the essential institutional and legal structures for a properly functioning asylum system’ (European Commission, 2016). As a result, asylum transfers from other EU states to Greece under the Dublin Regulation would gradually resume. Taken in combination with the closure of the ‘Balkan corridor’ and the implementation of the EU–Turkey Statement, the resumption of asylum seeker returns based on the Dublin Regulation effectively stripped the Greek coalition government of all the negotiating tactics it had previously employed in its blackmailing strategy. In effect, the conditions that encouraged the use of issue-linkage via blackmail in 2015 were no longer present by mid-2016, as Greece had become a host state of a significantly reduced number of asylum seekers.

Not surprisingly, once stripped of the conditions necessary for blackmailing, the SYRIZA–ANEL government shifted to a strategy of backscratching, characterised by co-operative rather than coercive foreign policy behaviour on the management of asylum seekers. Greek policymakers’ realisation that the geostrategic importance of Greece in the 2015–16 migrant crisis had been undermined led to a governmental shift towards backscratching. From the moment the EU–Turkey Statement went into effect on 20 March 2016, the Greek government has detained all migrants and asylum seekers arriving by sea in closed facilities on Greek islands (Frelick, 2016). In April 2016, the government ‘hastily’ passed Law 4375, which formally established a Ministry of Migration & Asylum, harmonized Greek law with European Parliament directives on vulnerable populations, and enabled ‘blanket “restriction of movement” on new arrivals inside closed facilities at border entry points for up to 25 days’ (Frelick, 2016).

Significant economic aid began flowing into Greece from March 2016 onwards (see Table 2). In May 2016, Greek authorities began relocating asylum seekers from the infamous Idomeni camp on the border with North Macedonia, which subsequently closed

Table 2: EU Financial Support to Greece, March 2016 to June 2019

<i>Responsible Entity</i>	<i>Internal Security Fund</i>	<i>Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund</i>	<i>Total</i>
Ministry of Migration and Asylum	€3.17m		€3.17m
Asylum Service		€17.46m	€17.46m
Hellenic Coast Guard	€33m		€33m
Ministry of Defence	€18.92m	€108.79m	€127.71m
Ministry of Interior	€24.97m	€3m	€27.97m
Ministry of Health		€24.18m	€24.18m
First Reception Service	€3.5m		€3.5m
TOTAL	€83.56m	€153.43m	€236.99m

Source: Authors' calculations.

operations. The aggressive government rhetoric of 2015 and early 2016 also disappeared for the remainder of the coalition government's term. Even Kammenos had 'a change of heart', which 'came after \$74 million was added to the defence ministry budget for refugee support, recurring annually.' As a result, 'In a period of less than 10 days the Greek army established spartan but functional facilities at the hot spots' (Howden and Fotiadis, 2017). In his June 2016 speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Tsipras encapsulated this policy shift. 'Greece continues to try to deal with the problem, but the migration crisis requires solidarity. We must work together. Only by co-operating with transit countries and with the countries of origin will we be able to address the phenomenon appropriately' (Council of Europe, 2016).

Since 2016, the SYRIZA–ANEL government agreed to abide by EU rules and detain asylum seekers in five hotspots across islands neighbouring Turkey (Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros, and Kos) with a total capacity of 6,178 places. By the end of 2019, they contained 38,423 persons (Hellenic Republic, 2019). In the absence of the conditions necessary for stronger leverage, Greece effectively complied with demands for externalisation control through immigration detention in the European periphery. While an analysis of this deteriorating situation is beyond the scope of this article, the repercussions of the Greek government's shift to a backscratching strategy are arguably reminiscent of externalisation attempts in the Global South. Similar agreements have been reached between the EU and Libya, the United States and Mexico, as well as the 'Pacific Solution' between Australia and Pacific island states, which receive funding to intercept and detain seaborne migrants headed for Australia.

Conclusion

As the management of forced migration features increasingly in EU and EU member states' policy agendas, there appears an expedient need to identify how it affects member states' foreign policy and, in particular, their negotiating strategies. Having identified a notable gap in the relevant literature on how refugees featured in the post-2009 Greek bailout negotiations, we examined separate strands of literature (international relations, refugee studies, as well as security studies) in a interdisciplinary approach to understanding Greece's attempts at leverage during the European migrant crisis. We argued that Greece put forth two approaches in the January 2015–July 2019 period. First, a

blackmailing issue-linkage approach based on threats was utilised between January 2015 and March 2016. Second, Greek policymakers shifted to a *backscratching* issue-linkage approach in the post-March 2016 period.

We identified how two conditions affect a state's issue-linkage approach: a high number of asylum seekers within its territory and an inflated geostrategic importance. A state is likely to resort to a blackmailing strategy only if both conditions are present. In the January 2015–March 2016 period, Greek policymakers believed they could employ the country's large numbers of refugees within its borders and its geostrategic importance (aided by the suspension of Dublin transfers) to coerce their negotiating partners into distinct payoffs. From March 2016 onwards, the numbers of asylum seekers and the country's geostrategic importance vis-à-vis the EU decreased, as a result of the EU–Turkey Statement, the closure of the Balkan Corridor, and Greece's return to the Dublin Regulation. Thus, Greek policymakers responded by shifting to a co-operative backscratching strategy.

This article contributes to a range of existing academic and policy debates on the interplay between forced migration, interstate bargaining, and the foreign policies of EU-member states. Firstly, we identify how issue-linkage strategies feature in the strategic calculations of European refugee host states and explore specific mechanisms at play, thereby providing an analytical framework that informs a range of stakeholders on state responses to forced migration. We also demonstrate how Greece attempted to employ the European migrant crisis in order to project national interests and its domestic agenda at the EU level, thereby identifying conditions that enable coercive or co-operative bargaining strategies. Finally, we offer a more nuanced picture of the importance of forced displacement for EU member states' foreign policy by demonstrating how intra-EU politics are affected by refugee crises on the broader neighbourhood.

Overall, we point to a novel research agenda regarding the effects of forced migration on European policy, namely the use of migrant and refugee flows by European policymakers as bargaining chips vis-à-vis the EU, particularly by smaller countries across the periphery. We pave the way for similar analyses of how Spain and Italy responded to the 2015–16 migrant crisis in order to analyse novel emerging dynamics across EU member states. We also demonstrate how the use of issue-linkage strategies is not limited to refugee host states of first asylum across the Global South, but is increasingly diffused across wealthy Western states, which seek to employ coercion for specific payoffs. Ultimately, we seek to demonstrate how the literature on European member states' foreign policy and intra-EU politics needs to place forced migration at the centre of analysis. The management of asylum seekers has the potential to create disintegrating forces within the EU as member states begin to employ coercive strategies against others in order to secure specific policy goals.

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