

Borders, Fences and Limits: Protecting Austria from Refugees. Metadiscursive negotiation of meaning in the current refugee crisis

1 Introduction

Example 1

There is a difference, whether one builds a border or whether one builds a small door with side-parts. There is no fence around Austria. This is a technical security measure that does not box in Austria. (Chancellor Faymann 28/10/15¹)

An integral part of the power that discourse can convey in the socio-political field comes with control over terminology and, thus, meaning. This often involves privileged access to (the production of) discourse via the media, legislation etc. and the strategic use of language in the form of, e.g., vagueness, neologisms/coining new terms and the reinterpretation, reformulation or recontextualisation of existing terminology (Wodak, 2015a, 2015b) as illustrated by Example 1, in which then Austrian Chancellor Faymann struggles to distinguish between a closed border and an unthreatening door with side-parts that would allow for regulated entry. The latter, he claims, is only a technicality, while the former would imply a total closure of the border.

As this debate takes place in a field of contesting forces, meanings are negotiated between social actors invested with power, traditionally on the backstage of politics and out of view of the public. Mediatized politics, however, makes the struggle over meanings and the terminology associated with it a public spectacle (Kellner, 2003). Recent developments in the so-called refugee crisis have reinforced this trend across Europe, at least since 2015. In this paper, we focus on Austria as a case in point, where prominent political actors in government were pressurised by the opposition as well as the media to publicly negotiate key terminology regarding the so-called “management” of migration and refugees. Competing terms for appar-

ently identical entities and differing meanings ascribed to a single term have dominated the frontstage of Austrian politics for much of 2015 and reveal a chaotic search for political and legal measures in order to better cope with refugees. The differing meanings refer to distinct ideological positions from the traditional left-wing and right-wing in one or a few words and concepts.

Specifically, pressure from the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ), which currently stands at over 30% in the opinion polls, has successfully fuelled a climate of fear. Calls to strictly limit the number of refugees allowed into Austria and build a fence to protect the border were voiced by some political actors, opposed by others, then reinforced and/or euphemised over the course of months. Eventually, both demands are met: On 11/11/15, the government agrees to build a “border management” system; on 20/01/16, an annual limit of 37.500 asylum applications is decided.

This paper traces the course of this mediatised struggle over meanings, often conflicting with or re-contextualising legal regulations and international conventions signed by Austria. Working within the framework of the Discourse-Historical Approach or DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016), we analyse a specific *discourse strand* as a distinct sub-discourse about migration, i.e. a corpus of media reporting defined by a common topic, an originating event with beginning and end, a discrete set of social actors, and strong intertextual links (e.g., Jäger, 2001; Wodak, 2002a, 2002b). We follow the concept of “context” as defined in the DHA in the structure of our paper and thus take into account: (1) the immediate language or text internal co-text (the distinct and unique utterances of politicians); (2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses (reformulations, recontextualisation, mediatisation of these utterances); (3) the language external social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific situational context (the detailed chronology of events); and (4) the broader socio-political and historical context in which the discursive practices are em-

bedded and to which they are related (the European and global “refugee crisis” 2015) (Wodak, 2015b).

Specifically, we focus on two *terminological conflicts* as they unfold between the two governing parties, the Social-Democratic Party (SPÖ), headed by Chancellor Faymann, and the Christian-Social Party (ÖVP), led by Vice-Chancellor Mitterlehner. Both debates refer to disciplining measures, i.e. how to best “protect Austria from the influx of refugees”. The first debate centres on the supposedly adequate term to denote the building of a *fence* or *wall* to protect the border, oscillating between terms such as “border fence” (*Grenzzaun*) and “a small door with side-parts” (*ein Türkl mit Seitenteilen*); the second debate revolves around labelling the *number of refugees* to be allowed to cross the border and apply for asylum – as either “maximum limit” (*Obergrenze*) or “guiding number” (*Richtwert*). These polarised and vehement debates expose ideological cleavages not only between but within the two involved parties as proponents of various positions contribute to them first and foremost in and through the media.

The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. How do struggles over meaning of terminology metonymically condense and signal distinct contrasting ideologies about border politics?
2. How are such struggles negotiated, legitimised, and ultimately decided in mediatised politics?
3. In which way such national struggles and their outcome influence (and are influenced by) trans-national European politics, transcending the level of the nation state?

In other words, our analysis focuses on struggles over meaning and key terminology associated with *borders* of different kinds, i.e. spatial and numerical. The latter, especially as it is metadiscursively negotiated in mediatised political discourse, condenses political ideologies about nationalism, border and body politics (Musolff, 2010; Vollmer, 2016a, 20116b; Wodak,

2015a, 2017). Borders – especially their maintenance and policing – are intimately linked to national identities and the national body. Developments, constructed and perceived as “external” to the nation/national body, are often articulated with a “loss of identity” or the threat thereof leading to appeals to ‘protect our country’ or to ‘regain control over our borders’ (Vaughan-Williams, 2009).

First, we summarise the historical context in which the two debates can be understood as strands in the discourse on refugees (section 2) and then provide a timeline for their more immediate context (section 3). After our theoretical discussion and an overview of methodology and data (sections 4 and 5), we present the qualitative and quantitative analyses (section 6). Our conclusion (section 7) discusses consequences of normalisation in terms of legal aspects and economisation of refugees.

2 Historical context: Migration and asylum in Austria

Although Austria’s national self-understanding of “not being a country of immigration” persists as a peculiar form of denial, Austria has long been shaped by migration. In the wake of the World War 2, renewed waves of immigration have defined the public self-image and public memory of migration (Mourão Permoser & Rosenberger, 2012). In the 1960ies, the so-called guest workers were invited to provide labour for Austria’s fast-growing economy (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2009). Beyond this, Austria admitted nearly 500,000 refugees in the course of the crises in the former communist countries Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1956, 1968 and 1981, respectively, although only a relatively small share of those stayed (e.g., 10% of the 180,000 Hungarians). After 1989, migration became an increasingly divisive aspect of Austrian politics, with the FPÖ in particular campaigning for strict immigration and naturalization laws, closing borders, and limiting asylum applications (Matouschek, Wodak, & Januschek, 1995). In an opportunistic bid to gain or keep voters, it was the SPÖ-ÖVP coalition which brought a radical shift in Austria’s migration policy in the

course of the 1990s, e.g. using the military to “assist” in controlling Austria’s eastern border to prevent “illegal border crossings”, reintroducing visa for several eastern European countries, measures to counteract “asylum abuse” and to quickly reject asylum applications. Overall, stricter requirements for obtaining residency as well as naturalization were implemented in the early 1990s (Perchinig, 2010; Kraler, 2011). In contrast to the policy focus on learning German, the FPÖ cultivated the image of the “lazy immigrant” and “bogus refugee” whose main interests in Austria were social welfare and unemployment benefits (Sedlak, 2000).

Between 2000 and 2006, the ÖVP-led government coalitions (ÖVP-FPÖ, then ÖVP-BZÖ – a splinter group of the FPÖ) amended several of these statutes, most prominently re-defining naturalization and citizenship as the “culmination point of integration” and introducing the “Integration Agreement” in 2002. This document intimates a contract between the respective immigrant and the Austrian state, detailing the immigrant’s obligations and commitment to integrate. Said obligations consisted largely of language requirements (Mourão Permoser & Rosenberger, 2012). The FPÖ’s campaigns, meanwhile, became more nativist and recontextualized migration as a burden on the welfare state and as an issue of security, not just in terms of crime (as before) but of terrorism in the wake of 9/11 (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2009). When the legal provisions for asylum and residency were revised in 2005, the declared aim was to prevent the abuse of asylum, to expedite the processing of asylum seekers, and to simplify the deportation of those who refused cooperation, were convicted of a criminal offense, or should have been processed by another country according to the Dublin regulations. In addition, the new residency law extended the existing Integration Agreement, reaffirming the focus on language requirements and adding cultural integration (Kraler, 2011). The discursive legitimation of these measures foregrounded the security and protection of native citizens against “abuse” of Austrian institutions by immigrants, indicating the restrictive migration policies of a government openly hostile to immigrants.

The subsequent SPÖ-ÖVP coalition governments have not revoked the restrictive policies outlined above but continued to implement stricter measures (e.g. restricting the movement of refugees). Integration rather than migration became the focus of official policy with a National Plan for Integration (Kraler, 2011), which found its institutional expression in the establishment of, first, a State Secretariat (since 2011) and then a Ministry for Integration (since 2014). Amendments made to the legal provisions in 2011 changed the language requirement for residency to a higher standard and made it a pre-condition before immigration. Even more emphasis was put on the efficient processing of asylum applications, fighting illegal immigration, and creating an effective deterrent against “bogus asylum seekers”. Further restrictions of the freedom of movement of all asylum seekers were implemented for the first five to seven days of their application under penalty of imprisonment. Since 2013, refugees have become an increasingly salient topic of political debate (e.g. in the form of deplorable conditions in the refugee camp Traiskirchen), as evidenced by the official minutes of parliamentary debates.¹ In its oppositional role, the FPÖ has intensified its rhetoric along the lines of “Austria first”, shifting its discourse first to increasingly anti-Muslim (Krzyżanowski, 2013; Forchtner, Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2013) and subsequently anti-refugee positions (Fuchs, 2016). The centre-right ÖVP and the centre-left SPÖ, being coalition partners and thus strongly expected to perform a consensus-oriented frontstage politics, had not publicly negotiated conflicting agendas regarding refugees and asylum. Within the immediate context of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, however, mediatized debates between the SPÖ and ÖVP intensified on the two salient issues of building a border fence to control the movement of refugees and setting a maximum limit on asylum applications.

¹ Based on a lexical analysis of the minutes of 757 debates in the Austrian National Assembly (1998-2016), comprising a corpus of approximately 56 million tokens.

3 Immediate context: April 2015 – February 2016

In order to provide a more precise contextualization of our linguistic analyses, we will summarize the local context in terms of arguably decisive discursive events, beginning with the first mentions of a maximum limit and a border fence (April and June 2015, respectively), and ending with the implementation of the respective decision (January and February 2015). This analytical demarcation of the two strands follows our focus on the meta-discursive negotiation of terminology in mediatized politics rather than on discourses about migration in general and on refugees in particular.

To summarize the immediate context, we identify several national and transnational tipping points in the debate linked to specific events, such as the closing of the Hungarian borders in summer 2015, the death of 71 refugees locked into an air-tight van discovered on an Austrian highway in 8/15, and the picture of drowned Alan Kurdi near Bodrum on 2/9/15. Each of these affected the discourse in specific but mutable ways: e.g., Hungary's border fence was initially rejected by the government but adopted as a model by the ÖVP; the tragedy of suffocated refugees led not only to sympathy for refugees but also to the blanket vilification of people smugglers as murderers as well as strengthened calls for strict border controls to save the lives of refugees. On a different level, there are regional influences tied to election campaigns in the Austrian regions of Styria, Burgenland, Upper Austria, and Vienna. In these campaigns, the perceived pressure by the FPÖ – tied, among other things, to opinion polls indicating its rising popularity – led all mainstream parties with the exception of the Vienna chapter of the SPÖ to align more and more with the FPÖ's position. Meanwhile, civil society became very active in providing support for arriving refugees and organized several demonstrations of solidarity, the largest of which was a free concert under the motto of "Voices for Refugees", performed on Vienna's prestigious Heldenplatz on 3/10/15 and attended by 150,000. Coming under increasing pressure – none of the policies decided on the EU level

being implemented – Austria’s foreign minister Kurz (ÖVP) proposed to close the Balkan route on 26/10/15. On the transnational level, the next major tipping points were the terrorist attacks in Paris on 13/11/15 and the incidents of sexual harassment on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, which helped shift the debate from welcoming refugees to ‘protecting our women from illegal migrants’. In Austria, the increasing polarisation manifested most clearly in the campaigns for the Austrian presidential election 2016, with candidates publicly taking position on the issues of border fence as well as maximum limit. The two discourse strands thus intersect and cut across regional and national elections, national and EU politics, as well as national and international crime and terrorism.

Figure 1: Timeline for the immediate context

4 Securitisation: Protecting Borders/Limits

3.1. Border politics

A renegotiation of the concept of the border has been occurring for more than a decade (Paasi, 2010; Vollmer, 2016). Increasing processes of securitisation and militarisation can be noticed not only at political levels but also at normative levels in what Vollmer (2016) terms the *moralisation of bordering*.

Moralization of bordering takes place when considering the balancing act of excluding a selection of people but at the same time standing on a high moral ground for which the EU and its Member States stand for. This exclusionary practice has been morally legitimized over the years by an array of policy frames [...], but also by a *narrative of deservingness*, that is, by following the principle of “some people do not deserve to be equally or treated in the way we (the ‘host’ society) use to treat human beings”.

Moralisation of borders thus requires a range of legitimation strategies (e.g., Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 104). Territorial borders have become more than a means to provide security

and control but symbolise social meanings that cut to the core of human life (e.g., Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Most importantly, *legitimation by authority* takes place by reference to authority. In other words, the answer to the implicit or explicit question “Why is it so?” or “Why must it be so?” is essentially “Because I say so”; or “Because so-and-so says so”, where the authority is someone invested with institutionalised authority – a parent, an expert, a famous scholar, a politician, etc. The authority may also be impersonal, e.g. “the regulations”, “the law”, “the Bible”. Secondly, we find legitimation by rationalisation (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 105). *Rationalisation legitimation* is legitimation by reference to some form of common sense, or by the experts who elaborate the domains of knowledge which can be used for the purpose of legitimation; for instance, economics can be used to legitimate contemporary austerity measures as in the interest of the nation. Such economization of discourse may manifest in references to resource or budget constraints that factually limit what one can do, and informs figurative slogans such as “The boat is full” (KhosraviNik, 2010; Forchtner, Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2013). More generally, legitimation may also be attempted via major religions and ideologies (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Finally, *moral legitimation* can be observed, justifying boundaries and borders in terms of health, leadership, public interest, and so forth. Usually, we are confronted by a combination of moral and authority legitimation justified by quasi rational arguments. The appeal to “order” and “the rule of law” as universal and superordinate values thus relates to often dehumanizing rhetoric, ultimately legitimizing the construction of a “Fortress” in paradoxical defence of liberal values.

Vollmer (2016) rightly states that ever higher security measures will not alleviate fear (fear of death, fear of “the Other”, fear of ‘the self’ and fear of social/economic existence, and so forth). Most migration control regimes were transformed – especially in the so-called “age of terrorism” – into *securitisation regimes* and attended by debates about distinctions between who is a migrant and who is a refugee and, even more significantly, about who is a genuine asylum seeker and who is a “bogus asylum seeker” (e.g., KhosraviNik, 2010).

These developments have caused border politics to be increasingly framed as body politics, constructing nation states as bodies that have to be protected from “invasion, penetration, infection or disease” (Musolff, 2004, p. 437 ff). As Wagner and Weisböck (2015) observe, the sites of border regimes are not exclusively geographically definable lines. Above all, they are fields of action that are transformed into border spaces only through the control and oversight of border officials and patrols. The measure of these fields of action only indirectly depends on local spaces. We extend their argument by arguing that mediatised debates such as the ones analysed here discursively transform or re-organise the border space under regimes of management (economisation) and control (securitisation).

3.2. Mediatisation and securitisation

Following pertinent research, we understand mediatised politics as politics that actually depends upon the mechanisms and reach of mass media, which is therefore ineffective without them (Strömbäck, 2008; Preston, 2009; Forchtner, Krzyżanowski, & Wodak, 2013). In close connection with mediatisation effects, a “securitisation of migration” in relation to terrorism has been observed in post-9/11 migration policies as well as the Schengen agreements and the gradual dismantling of national borders within the European Union (Bigo, 2002; Scheibelhofer, 2012, p. 325). The observation that migration has been constructed as a “risk to the liberal world [...] normalizing the view that immigrants are a threat” (Ibrahim, 2005, p. 163) is captured in the notion of securitisation. Securitisation occurs when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object – i.e., the state, incorporating government, territory, and society. According to Buzan, de Wilde, & Wæver (1998, p. 21), traditionally, by declaring an emergency condition a state representative will claim a right to use whatever means are necessary to block a threatening development.

The special nature of security threats can be invoked to justify the use of extraordinary measures to handle them (Buzan, de Wilde, & Wæver, 1998, p. 21-24) – i.e. governmental

acts of power such as forced registration of refugees, militarisation, use of police and military force, building a razor wire on the border etc. This is a securitising move insofar as threats are discursively constructed in the sense that they do not simply “exist” independently of our knowledge and representations of them. They are brought into being by processes (characterisation of the nature of a “threat” in, e.g., political speeches and media coverage) and actors (such as state representatives and media outlets) (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010, p. 5-6). Securitisation and mediatisation are thus interlinked when political actors depend on mass media to construct a referent as an existential security threat. In the context of the present study, the 13/11 terrorist attacks in Paris reinforced the Europeanization of discourses on refugees – which had already been established inasmuch as it had been identified as a “European problem” requiring a “European solution” in terms of border control as well as the humanitarian management and distribution – as an issue of security.

5 Methodology and Data

Our analysis combines the DHA with the *conceptual analysis* of social and political concepts in the tradition of German *Begriffsgeschichte* (Koselleck, 2002; Ifversen, 1997; Krzyżanowski, 2010; Stråth & Wodak, 2009). Such a methodological combination allows tracing the re-contextualisation of different aspects of policy and major policy-relevant discourses (on economy, democracy and society, migration, etc.) and analysing how the *semantic fields* of border and border-management as well as related concepts changed in a particular discourse over the period under investigation. In our context-sensitive analysis, we strongly rely on the multi-level representation and definition of context outlined above to integrate the influence of changing socio-political conditions (i.e. the historical and immediate context) on the dynamics of discursive practices (media reporting) with an in-depth analysis of relevant texts.

To gain a better methodological grasp of the particular segment of discourse of interest, we draw on the concept of *discourse strand* to operationalise in corpus-linguistic terms what

might otherwise be called a “debate” or “discussion”. We define discourse strands as topical threads within discourses (Jäger, 2001; Wodak, 2002a, 2002b); ideally, such strands can be investigated through subcorpora representing the discourses they are thematically part of or linked to. In summary, the arguments for implementing the notion of discourse strand in such a fashion are:

- topical continuity
- strong intertextual links (often explicit) among its elements
- relative temporal proximity
- an often limited group of social actors (focused social field)
- an initiating event or events
- topically and temporally bounded
- high keyness values (of subcorpora vis-à-vis corpora)

Discourse strands allow for a clear delimitation in terms of a beginning and end (e.g. of a public debate or reporting of an event), thus defining the object of investigation. This in turn allows for focused contextualisation in terms of the four-levels-of-context model along timelines, a useful tool in tracing the dynamics of discursive shifts, e.g. peaks and normalisation (e.g., Figures 1 and 2).

In our research, the discourse on refugees in Austrian media throughout 2015² is represented by a corpus of 6701 texts compiled from 11 Austrian newspapers with wide circulation (i.e. *Der Standard*, *Die Presse*, *Heute*, *Kleine Zeitung*, *Kronen Zeitung*, *Kurier*, *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, *Österreich*, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, *Wiener Zeitung*) as well as 4 magazines (*Profil*, *News*, *Biber*, the Austrian edition of *Die Zeit*). Within this corpus, the two discourse strands about building a border fence (“*Grenzzaun*”) and setting a maximum limit for asylum seekers (“*Obergrenze*”) are represented by two subcorpora of

newspaper and magazine articles from the above-mentioned sources, including the journalistic genres of report, commentary, and interview. These subcorpora were compiled on a thematic and lexical basis, yielding 1697 texts for the discourse strand about building a border fence and 372 texts for setting a maximum limit (both 1/4/15 – 24/2/16). The two strands overlap (i.e. intersect textually when topics are combined) and show interdiscursive links with discourses on terrorism, federalism, economics, integration, crime etc.

Using corpus linguistic methods, we trace the rise and ebb of terminology in the two discourse strands as well as their interdiscursivity with discourses on terrorism, security, economy, values and human rights. Beyond frequency analysis, we use concordancing to investigate who uses – or, rather, is reported as using – which terminology at what point in time and in what linguistic context. These corpus linguistic perspectives are complemented by qualitative analyses focused on the legitimisation and justification of claims, proposals (e.g. of measures), and decisions – using argumentation theory (Reisigl, 2014) and theory of legitimisation (Wodak, 2017). This combination of text-oriented qualitative and quantitative analyses facilitates robust multi-level insights and avoids imposing interpretative categories on data that is both substantial and varied, as frequently encountered in quantitative content analysis.

6 Analysis

The two discourse strands play out over a period of several months, each with its own peaks and lulls, beginning in 4/15 and coming to at least a preliminary close when both issues – building a border fence and setting a maximum limit – are decided and implemented. In terms of media attention, they differ widely in terms of texts published each month. Figure 2 shows the border fence issue to be much more virulent than the maximum limit, despite the latter's even graver legal implications regarding the Austrian Constitution and International Law. This is likely due to its symbolic value and the material reality of a physical fence meant to protect national integrity in the form of demarcating the national body. The resemiotisation of

the “border” concept in the form of a numerical “limit” is particularly pertinent in the lexical overlap between the German compounds “*Grenzzaun*” and “*Obergrenze*”, both of which denote a particular kind of border, i.e. “*Grenze*”. Moreover, the tipping points mentioned above become visible in September and November for the “border fence”; in November, December and January for the “maximum limit”.

Figure 2: Number of published newspaper articles pertaining to the “maximum limit” and “border fence” (per month), showing interdiscursive overlap³

6.1 Discourse strand “border fence” (*Grenzzaun*)

While most members of government were at pains to avoid the term “border fence” in the discussion of plans to at least partially close the border and strengthen control, the oppositional FPÖ was using the term to signal its hard stance regarding refugees. Everyone involved, however, seemed to be acknowledging that even though it could not be called by its name, what everyone was talking about was, after all, a fence. In October 2015, during a visit to the border check point where most refugees were crossing the border at the time, then-Minister of Interior Johanna Mikl-Leitner (ÖVP) lost her composure and appealed to moralised bordering; deontic modality emphasizes her point: the “Fortress Europe” *must* be built.

Example 2

Minister of Interior Johanna Mikl Leitner (ÖVP) demanded a better protection of the EU’s outer borders. “We must build Fortress Europe”, the Minister used usually drastic words during a visit on-site by Minister of Defence Gerald Klug (SPÖ). [...] Without better protection of the EU’s exterior borders that situation will be impossible to get under control in the medium-run, said the Minister. (Minister of Interior Mikl-Leitner, 23/10/15⁴)

In this context, Mikl-Leitner legitimizes the building of a fence by theoretical rationalization, i.e. a fence is the only possible way of maintaining control. She implies that losing control would be dangerous for the EU, thus incorporating the topos of danger.

A week later, after a cabinet meeting, journalists pushed the minister on the question of whether the “border management measures” to be implemented were not, in fact, about the blatantly avoided “border fence”. Explicit moralization of borders occurs in Example 3: If borders protect the EU, then they are – by definition – good, expunging the very possibility of anything bad.

Example 3

Of course this is also about a fence. There is nothing bad about a fence. (Minister of Interior Mikl-Leitner, 28/10/15⁵)

Some weeks earlier, her party’s leader (and Austria’s Vice-Chancellor) had first elaborated a similar logic to normalize what had long been a strongly negatively connoted term, arguing that the necessary and, indeed, logical course of action was to turn Europe into the “Fortress Europe”.

Example 4

Europe will not be finished only if we succeed in solving the asylum problem in a solidary and orderly manner. That means: The outer borders must be controlled; hotspots must be established at the outer borders as emergency intake centers, and every asylum applicant who illegally travels onward will be transferred back there. And then there has to be an orderly verification procedure that corresponds to the EU’s system of law. That means: Europe, in principle, is becoming the Fortress Europe. (Vice-Chancellor Mitterlehner, 19/9/15⁶)

Using a conditional phrasing to anchor his argument, Mitterlehner immediately sets out the threat and goes on to present a single possible solution, on which the very survival of the EU depends. The strategy of legitimation is substantiated by the topoi of danger (the EU might soon be finished), responsibility (governments should act in an orderly fashion) and control (order equates control): only by carefully controlling borders, and thus restricting the movement immigrants and asylum seekers, will the EU be able to survive. The argument then continues – if all these measures were implemented, the EU would be transformed into a ‘Fortress Europe’, legitimized by the danger of an existential threat.

Before taking a detailed look at terminological issues associated with this struggle over border concepts, we will explore some salient aspects of these concepts’ realisation in the discourse strand at hand, most notably spatial distribution. Analysis of all toponyms in this discourse strand reveals a strong focus on Europe and the EU, followed by Austria and borders. However, the debate is also driven by political actors on the regional/provincial level. Table 1, including all toponyms grouped semantically by referent, indicates the discourse strand’s salient geographical and regional focus.

Table 1: Toponyms in the discourse strand on building a border fence (by referent)⁷

Lexical analysis furthermore indicates a striking plethora of border-related terminology, some of which can be considered neologisms. These terms proliferate in the course of the strand’s development over time, as though there were a need to lexically populate the border region and demarcate or reinforce the border itself. In particular, compounding with “*Grenze*”, i.e. “border”, is shown to be very productive in this context (166 unique compound lemmas).⁸

The semantic field laid out by these compounds is visualised in Figure 3 below, sorting the lexical items in 6 groups (roughly from left to right): the border region (e.g. people and towns on the Austrian side of the border); the border itself; the border’s demarcation (e.g. fence); measures to protect and safeguard the border (e.g. controls, police, soldiers); orderly openings

in the border (e.g. regular commuter traffic, gates); and threats against the border (e.g. illegal crossings, riots). We note that although the textual basis we compiled to represent the discourse strand is focused on the “border fence”, the word “border” actually occurs more frequently; while notions that commonly delineate the “line of the border” are rare, there is a proliferation of euphemistic terminology compounded with “border”, and thus tied to the border space. The latter resemiotise the physical object of the “fence” as actions and measures like “securing” and “protecting” or abstractions like “control” and “management”. There is also a notable absence of compounds that build on “border fence”, while there are numerous three-part compounds that build on “border space” or “border control”.

Insert Figure 3 horizontally (landscape orientation)

Figure 1: Map of compounds in the discourse strand on building a border fence; frequency is mapped to font size (Tables 2a-e in the online data repository)

The lexical items tied to the notion of “border” are not, however, the only semantic field of interest. At the outset of the mediated political struggle over whether Austria should build a border fence, the two governing parties pursued opposite agendas, the ÖVP campaigning for a border fence, the SPÖ (at least on the federal level) against it. Lexical analysis shows that the political actors opposing it were never able to establish a strong opposite or antonym vis-à-vis “border fence” (*Grenzzaun*), as for instance “open borders” or “solidarity” might have explicitly maintained a Social-Democratic, human rights-based position. Collocates for “*Grenze*” [border] and “*Grenzzaun*” [border fence] indicate only two opposing phrasings, i.e. “*gegen*” [against] and “*offen*” [open], with low frequencies of 150/131 and 97/0 for the two terms, respectively.

The border fence being a highly symbolic referent, in particular with respect to the Iron Curtain which once separated Austria from its Eastern neighbours, there was intense negotiation of terminology between the political actors involved. Since “border fence” is negatively connoted, those in favour of building it – initially only the ÖVP, later on also the SPÖ – sought to

establish euphemisms deeply embedded in moralizing and rationalizing legitimation. This was undermined, however, by the Vice-Chancellor and the Minister of Interior Affairs, both ÖVP, beginning to advocate a “Fortress Europe” (see Examples 2, 3 and 4 above).

Figure 4 below aggregates all euphemisms for “border fence”, showing that they – inasmuch as they are not restricted to the physical reality of the fence – eventually replace “fence” as indexical in threat scenarios related to migration. It furthermore indicates the frequency of “terrorism” and other fear-related terminology in news reporting: fears, worries, threatening depictions of refugees as an unstoppable natural catastrophe and threat. Instead of declining with the use of “fence”, these increase after the physical fence is completed in January, thus substantiating Vollmer’s (2016) claim elaborated above (section 4). In terms of our data, the correlation between building a fence and the threat of terrorism seems to dissolve after the fence is built (and appears to be ineffective). We also note that in the wake of incidents of sexual harassment during New Year’s Eve, the mediated threat scenario shifts from an external to an internal one: The fence, symbolic though it may be, is not well suited to protecting the national body constructed as the gendered body of Austrian women.

Figure 4: “Border fence” and euphemisms in relation to salient fear- and threat-related terms (frequency by month)

Although euphemisms are an often successful means in the political field for obscuring issues, saving face or in strategies of calculated ambivalence, certain conditions will pre-empt such success. In our case, the multiple voices and positions in the discourse made it impossible for any of the leading political actors to establish a coherent narrative around a euphemism. Right from the outset, the policy to be euphemised had already been named: partly in terms of the exemplary border fence in Hungary, partly in terms of the oppositional FPÖ calling for a similar fence in Austria. Secondly, the ÖVP decided for a fence much earlier than the SPÖ (or rather, strong-armed the second), leading to a split appearance of the coalition government in

using diverging terminology. In this, the ÖVP was developing euphemisms that the SPÖ initially treated as such, making sure everyone knew they were, indeed, talking about a border fence. Only when the SPÖ, too, decided for a fence, did they begin to use similar euphemisms, completely reversing their previous language use. Finally, all of this took place under the conditions of mediatised politics, with every internal contradiction and slip of the tongue immediately broadcast or printed for the public at large. Needless to say, strategic use of euphemisms becomes impossible.

6.2 Discourse Strand “*maximum limit*” (*Obergrenze*)

Linked closely to the discourse strand about building a border fence, the second strand focused on a border of a more abstract kind, the numerical limit on asylum seekers accepted. In this strand – less strongly mediatized but legally more contentious discourse strand, insofar as it touched upon basic human rights – discursive counter-positions were more numerous and more articulate. In particular, the Viennese chapter of the SPÖ and Austria’s then president (also formerly SPÖ) stood out in this counter-discourse:

Example 5

The boat won’t be full for a long time. During the war in Bosnia, we took in 80,000. (Vienna’s Mayor Häupl, 4/10/15)

Häupl here reverses the metaphor of “the boat” being full, alluding to the historically loaded use of the metaphor when Switzerland rejected Jewish refugees in 1938. His opposition to the maximum limit is thus articulated with a historical analogy (topos of history) that he then extends to Austria’s solidarity during the war in Bosnia.

Example 6

There can be no maximum limit on humaneness. Those who are fleeing must be helped.

The debate about a maximum limit is a sedative pill for the population. (Secretary of the SPÖ's Vienna Chapter Niedermühlbichler 4/1/15)

Here, the counter-position is argued on principles – human rights are inalienable – and the call for a maximum limit is recontextualised as a populist measure without solving the real problem.

Along similar lines, Austria's President explicated the fundamental contradiction and injustice of such an arbitrary limit.

Example 7

There is a fundamental contradiction between a human right and setting a maximum limit:

One cannot limit a human right to a specific number and say, everyone above that number are out of luck. (President Fischer 27/12/15)

On the other hand, we see a strong economisation of discourse from those arguing in favour of a maximum limit: The appeal to (naturally) “limited resources”, “the budget” or simply “the economy” combines the legitimisation strategies of rationalisation and authority. Examples 8 and 9, respectively, realise these with arguments of burden and cost-benefit.

Example 8

Therefore this conception of asylum as a fundamental right is a theoretical thought game that has its limits in the factual. (Governor Haslauer, 2/1/16⁹)

Example 9

We still see asylum as an individual right, but in reality we are confronted with an un-directed mass migration. [...] We have to be economical with that. Anything that goes beyond that will overstrain the country. The consequence is a stop in that area. (Vice-Chancellor Mitterlehner, 12/1/16)¹⁰

The examples above illustrate discursive strategies of rationalization legitimation in what might well be termed a fundamental paradox: Rather than making a claim on defending Austrian and European values, as was commonly done earlier that year (Rheindorf, forthcoming), both speakers recontextualize the maximum limit in economic terms and, in Example 9, a cost-benefit argument. While the defence of values would all-too-obviously clash with undermining such fundamental values as human rights, the economic frame allows for an opposition between the “theoretical thought game” of human rights and the “factual reality” of economics – with the latter apparently dominating the former. In effect, the argument that human rights present something of a luxury one can afford only under economic considerations does not accept human rights as inalienable. This shift must be understood as following the gradual Europeanization of the “refugee crisis”.

In comparison to building a border fence, the discourse strand about setting a maximum limit on refugees took off relatively late and never reached equally intense media coverage. In this case, the SPÖ tried to position a “European solution”, “*europäische Lösung*”, as the counter-concept to “maximum limit”. A further term that gained some prominence in the debate was “*Richtwert*” [guiding number], which might be regarded as either a euphemism for maximum limit (with a less strict denotation, indicating some flexibility rather than a clear demarcation) or a counter-concept. Unlike the goal of a European solution, however, it also revolves around defining an annual target number of asylum applications or refugees to be allowed into Austria and depends on the ability and will to close the borders once that number is reached. In this way, the SPÖ clearly accommodates to the ÖVP and FPÖ positions; the process of “normalisation” of right-wing ideologies can be observed *in actu* (Wodak, 2015b; Rheindorf, forthcoming).

Figure 5: Central terminology for the number of refugees allowed (frequency per month)

To provide insight into how the discursive representation of the debate constructs the political actors as actively engaged in negotiating the “maximum limit”, we used concordancing.¹¹ Visualised in Figure 6 below, the salient concordances give a comparative overview of the positions taken by the most prominent political actors in relation to the term: Centered on “*Obergrenze*”, the figure expands through all adjectives, noun phrase heads and complements, verbs and social actors directly associated with the term (frequencies are given in brackets). Clusters to the left are grouped by verb semantics indicating stance and type of speech act¹² (from top to bottom: necessity; volition; debate; decision; rejection), while adjectives and actors are displayed as they occur with those groups. Clusters to the right are grouped by collocate semantics (from top to bottom: non-Austrian political actors; that which is to be limited; Austrian political actors as passive verb phrase components; specifications of the numerical limit; passive verb phrase components without actors¹³).

Figure 6: Concordances for “maximum limit” (*Obergrenze*)

The ramifications of clusters indicate the contested use of the term “*Obergrenze*”. For one, we see a variety of qualities being associated with it, mostly positive (e.g. concrete, clear, and exact) and mostly in concordances also containing its advocates (e.g. Mitterlehner, Mikl-Leitner). These attributes are clearly aligned with or supportive of rationalisation and economisation (e.g. capacity-oriented, factual). The opposing view rejects, questions or criticises the term, qualifying it as amoral or unrealistic (e.g. taboo, fictive, or theoretical). Semantically, these qualities are indeed opposed to the rationalised facticity of the maximum limit, but they provide little argumentative support.

The two alternative terms show much smaller frequency and narrow range of collocations.¹⁴ In relation to “*Lösung*”, we see a high number of impersonal constructions that hedge (e.g., “it needs, it must”) or collectivise (e.g., “we must, we need”) the speakers’ position in endorsing the European solution as well as rejecting national solutions (e.g., “we do not need”). Beyond

that, there are positive qualifications (e.g., “joint, humane, sustainable”), mainly voiced by Faymann; however, these are counter-acted through negative characterisations – mainly the media – that describe Faymann as irresponsibly hoping for a European solution (e.g., “dreaming, struggling”).

In relation to the guiding number or “*Richtwert*”, concordancing shows members of both SPÖ and ÖVP using the term, albeit differently. While the former emphasise its opposition to the maximum limit (e.g. instead of), the latter stress the economic orientation analogous to the maximum limit (e.g. capacity-oriented, financial). The term is also used frequently as instrumental for maintaining social stability in Austria (i.e., to protect, to safeguard social justice and social peace). In summary, both government parties struggle over the term’s meaning, using it in different contexts and attributing different qualities to it.

7 Conclusion

In the two discourse strands analysed in both qualitative and quantitative ways, we are confronted with prime examples of euphemistic and vague language use. As the SPÖ and the ÖVP form a grand coalition in Austria since 2006 and have been coming under ever greater pressure from the FPÖ since 2010, both parties seem caught in a no-win situation. On the one hand, they continuously defend and promote their traditional ideological positions; on the other hand, they have to react to momentous and unpredictable humanitarian crises such as the refugee situation. Thirdly, however, they attempt to maintain their electorates by positioning themselves against their greatest immediate perceived threat: the polarising and simplistic scapegoating of the FPÖ which mediatises and instrumentalises fear, constructs as well as exaggerates scenarios of existential threat to the nation, and claims to be the only party capable of guaranteeing security and protection for Austria and the Austrians. Caught in such contradictory tensions, the governing parties have continuously lost ground and failed to implement their positions.

In the course of 2015, the ÖVP quickly jumped on the FPÖ's band-waggon, legitimising their policy shifts by rational legitimation and economic arguments. The SPÖ first attempted to maintain their human rights principles but gradually compromised this stance (apart from the Vienna chapter) to the point of reversing it under the pressure of opinion polls indicating the rise of the FPÖ, legitimising their policy change by arguments of necessity and burden. However, the normalisation of exclusionary rhetoric does not automatically lead to more voters. Voters tend to elect consistency and not flip-flop politics. Thus, both (formerly) grand parties lost in regional and presidential elections in 2015 and 2016, apart from Vienna, where the SPÖ and Greens resisted the FPÖ's attacks.

The Europeanization of the political debate, particularly its mediatization, corresponds to the apparent influence of events in Europe on local policies. The EU's failure to implement a humanitarian solution serves as rational legitimation for nationalizing the issue and allows political actors to recontextualize Austrian policy as carrying the weight of a European responsibility, claiming credit for setting off the "domino effect" of national solutions.

As illustrated in much detail, the two discourse strands condense contrary ideological positions; they trigger and activate a range of moral values and seemingly rational arguments, and related legitimation strategies; i.e., ideolegemes like "Christian values", "human rights", "social peace", "protection of women", and so forth. At several key moments in 2015, the two strands overlap, indicating that the mediatised politics over "border fence" and "maximum limit" are indeed connected in various meaningful ways. According to the arguments dominating the "border fence" strand, building and securing the border would indeed protect the nation and imply an end to all kinds of complex problems. In the slightly different frame of the arguments in the "maximum limit" strand, the regulation and restriction of numbers (i.e. refugees allowed entry) become possible when walls are erected. While the former is thus a prerequisite for the latter, it is in fact insufficient by itself; this runs counter, however, to the

symbolic (and discursive) value attached to the “border fence” and becomes apparent only once it is built. The focus then shifts abruptly to establishing a “maximum limit”, resemiotising the politics of delimiting and policing the national body.

In sum, our analysis illustrates that normalisation is ongoing, very rapidly and effectively reactivating old imaginaries of protection through fences – an imaginary that is destabilised by new threat scenarios of the demonised male migrant (now metonymically associated with Cologne) as an Other who is unwilling or even incapable (culturally, mentally, even biologically) of assimilating to the host society (Rheindorf, forthcoming). Counter-discourses from NGOs, experts and civil society were hardly represented in the terminology-focused mediation. In the moralisation of such border and body politics, hegemonic positions maintain that, of course, one would love to help and support the “real” refugees, but international politics as well as national economic limitations are factual realities that do not allow for the idealism of human rights. Borders are “moral”, then, also in the sense that politicians can thus make a claim to be acting responsibly, using cost-and-benefit analyses in an effort to protect social security and cohesion; an argument that casts the so-called “do-gooders” as naïve dreamers of utopian worlds. But because their naivety is no less a danger to the security of the nation, this becomes part of the overall threat scenario as well. Deliberative argumentation is not possible in such heated and polarised debates; a politics of negative emotions, full of exaggerations and prejudiced generalisations – seemingly corroborated by rumours and panic mongering in social media –, overrides any differentiated and rational positionings and undermines compromises and negotiations where they would be most essential.

While the “domino effect” of national border fences strained international relations and altered the landscape of southern Europe, the landscape of Austrian politics would also be decisively altered in the wake of the above-analysed discourse strands: The federal SPÖ’s flip-flopping on the refugee crisis radically undermined its trustworthiness – showing, among oth-

er things, in the disastrous result of the SPÖ candidate for president –, ultimately leading to the resignation of Chancellor Faymann on 9/5/16. The two remaining candidates in the protracted presidential election (FPÖ and Greens) very clearly manifested antithetical positions on border politics as well as other key ideological issues, dividing the electorate almost exactly in half.

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Appendix – Original Text Extracts

Example 1

Es ist ein Unterschied, ob man eine Grenze baut oder ob man ein Türl baut mit Seitenteilen. Es ist kein Zaun rund um Österreich. Das ist eine technische Sicherheitsmaßnahme, die Österreich nicht einkastelt.

Example 2

Innenministerin Johanna Mikl-Leitner (ÖVP) hat bei einem Besuch in Spielfeld die bessere Absicherung der EU-Außengrenzen gefordert. „Wir müssen an einer Festung Europa bauen“, griff die Ministerin beim Lokalausgang mit Verteidigungsminister Gerald Klug (SPÖ) zu ungewohnt drastischen Worten. [...] Ohne besseren Schutz der EU-Außengrenzen sei die Situation mittelfristig nicht in den Griff zu bekommen, so die Ministerin.

Example 3

Natürlich geht es auch um einen Zaun. An einem Zaun ist nichts Schlechtes.

Example 4

Europa ist dann nicht am Ende, wenn es gelingt, das Asylproblem in solidarischer und geordneter Weise zu lösen. Das heißt: Die Außengrenzen müssen kontrolliert werden; an den Außengrenzen müssen Hotspots als Erstaufnahmezentren eingerichtet werden, und jeder Asylbewerber, der illegal weiterreist, wird dorthin rücktransferiert. Und dann muss es ein geordnetes Prüfverfahren geben, das dem Rechtssystem der EU entspricht. Das bedeutet: Europa wird im Prinzip zur „Festung Europa“.

Example 5

Das Boot ist noch lange nicht voll. Im Bosnienkrieg haben wir 80.000 aufgenommen –die sind dann halt nicht mehr unsichtbar.

Example 6

Es kann keine Höchstgrenze für Menschlichkeit geben. Denen, die flüchten, muss man helfen. Die Obergrenzendebatte ist eine Beruhigungsspiel für die Bevölkerung.

Example 7

Es gibt einen grundsätzlichen Widerspruch zwischen einem Menschenrecht und der Festsetzung einer Obergrenze: Ich kann nicht ein Menschenrecht auf eine bestimmte Zahl reduzieren und sagen, alle, die über dieser Zahl liegen, haben Pech gehabt.

Example 8

Daher ist diese Überlegung, Asyl ist ein Grundrecht, ein theoretisches Gedankenspiel, das eine Grenze im Faktischen hat.

Example 9

Wir gehen immer noch von Asyl als individuelles Recht aus, sind aber in Wirklichkeit mit einer ungesteuerten Völkerwanderung konfrontiert. [...] Damit müssen wir wirtschaften. Alles was darüber hinausgeht, überfordert das Land. Die Konsequenz ist ein Stopp in diesem Bereich.

¹ <http://orf.at/stories/2306741/2306742/>

² This paper reports research conducted as part of the FWF-funded research project *On the discursive construction of Austrian identity/ies 2015: A longitudinal perspective* (P 27153). While data from television, radio and social media are also analysed in this larger project, here we focus on a relatively homogeneous data set in order to allow for corpus linguistic analysis. See <http://nationale-identitaet-2015.univie.ac.at/>

³ The number of articles is presented as a solid line for the respective discourse strand; the shaded area extending up or down, respectively, indicates the number of articles that also address the other strand, thus showing the carrying extent of topical overlap.

⁴ <http://derstandard.at/2000024358096>

⁵ ZIB2 ORF news, 28/10/15

⁶ <http://www.salzburg.com/nachrichten/dossier/fluechtlinge/sn/artikel/mitterlehner-im-sn-interview-bauen-ander-festung-europa-166324/>

⁷ The full word list of lemma by frequency and occurrence in percentile of texts can be found in Table 1 of the data repository at <http://nationale-identitaet-2015.univie.ac.at/publikationen/>.

⁸ Tables 2a-e in the data repository give statistical data for all compound lemmas with “Grenze” in the discourse strand on building a border fence.

⁹ <http://diepresse.com/home/politik/innenpolitik/4897195/>

¹⁰ http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20160112_OTS0125/

¹¹ Table 3 in the repository gives the lemma of all collocates for “Obergrenze” (5 left and 5 right) by frequency.

¹² Here and in the following we refer to grammatical concepts that allow us to distinguish how speakers relate to the world and their actions, such as speech act theory (Searle, 1969) and functional grammar (Halliday, 2013).

¹³ The grammatical categories of verb phrase components are used here to help distinguish the way the term “Obergrenze” is presented: In the former case, political actors relate to the term via a verb such as “demand”, i.e.

“the maximum limit demanded by Haslauer”; in the latter case, the verb phrase used does not include such an actor but presents the limit as “being reached”.

¹⁴ Tables 4 and 5 in the data repository present collocates for “Lösung” and “Richtwert”, respectively.