



‘Ukraine’s Cause is Ours!’ Diaspora and Migration in Swedish Parliamentary Debates, 2014–2022

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ABSTRACT

The annexation of Crimea, the subsequent insurgency of Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014 and the current full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine have led to different responses from political elites, diasporas and migrants currently residing in different European countries. The historic decision of Sweden to send defence weapons to Ukraine as well as to apply for NATO membership after the invasion in 2022, as compared with mostly ‘soft’ support before, is just one of the examples of this shift. The political role of diasporic and migrant organizations in lobbying for support for Ukraine and sanctions against Russia has also significantly increased: party leaders and high-level politicians are more frequently at the demonstrations for support for Ukraine organized by diasporas. In this article I analyse Swedish Parliamentary debates and arguments for different types of action for Ukraine between 2014 and 2022. I specifically focus on the space occupied by Ukrainian diasporic and migrant individuals/organizations in such debates and arguments.

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The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led to a sequence of shock responses from the EU countries, and specifically the Nordic region. Sweden, known for its adherence to neutrality and legislation limiting military aid to countries in a current state of war, has both sent weapons to Ukraine and applied for membership to NATO. All the political parties in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, voted to lift the limits on military aid at the beginning of the war, with the exception of the Left Party, which is known for its anti-war position and limited foreign influence advocacy, but after a few days of consideration, it too consented to the vote. During the first few days of the war, thousands of demonstrations were organized against the Russian aggression, and not just primarily by the diaspora. In fact, it was civil society organizations and human rights organizations, together with the diasporas, that were the most active. Prominent political figures, such as political party leaders in the Riksdag, former prime ministers, former foreign affairs ministers and other political activists who have not been known to show their support to countries at war before, frequented the demonstrations. On the anniversary of the start of the war, the current prime minister, Ulf Kristersson, spoke to a crowd of thousands on the importance of acting in defence of Ukraine.

Prior to 2014, migration from Ukraine had been conceptualized mostly within the economic migration frames in Sweden and Europe more generally (Migrationsverket 2023). When Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014 and then started and supported insurgency in the eastern region of Ukraine, migration from Ukraine also included refugees, though the majority of migrants from Ukraine continued to be framed as economic. This, of course, has changed since February 2022, when Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Political elites' participation and interaction with migrants and diasporas as well as their standing firmly in support of a certain country in a war is unprecedented in Sweden, and in the Nordic countries in general. The initial period of the conflict, 2014–2021, in eastern Ukraine had never mobilized the Swedish elites on this level. The communication between Ukrainian and Russian diasporas was mainly limited to local instances as well as through the channels of umbrella migrant organizations such as the Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige (SIOS)¹ in Sweden. In this paper I aim to understand how political elites have framed the Russian–Ukrainian War since 2014 and to track the changes that might signify the conditions for the increased communication between migrant/diasporic groups and politicians. I use the protocols of parliamentary debates between 2014 and 2022 that mention Ukraine and use computational and qualitative text analysis to delve into the contextual framing of the war as per different themes and topics it is placed in, as well as to uncover the potential narrative framing of the Russian–Ukrainian War in comparison to other historical and current wars and conflicts. I specifically focus on the ways in which these protocols use migrant/diasporic groups to argue for certain political actions and whether there is any communication between such groups and politicians that the politicians use to further their agendas.

This study focuses on the political (re)framing of migration in the context of the Russian–Ukrainian War. I am specifically interested in uncovering the ways in which the Russian–Ukrainian War and the Swedish reception of Ukrainian refugees have framed

¹ SIOS (Samarbetsorgan för etniska organisationer i Sverige) is an umbrella organization of 'ethnic organizations' in Sweden that has contact with politicians in the form of meetings and briefings. It receives its funding from Parliament-based grants.

the ways in which other war-related migration is narrated in the political sphere. This (re)framing might have a potential impact on how migration policies are constructed and how diasporic mobilizations take shape and form in the Swedish context. The paper starts with a more detailed discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and previous research, and then a discussion of the data and methodology, followed by the results and a discussion and conclusion.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The way migration is framed has effects on the policies and livelihoods of migrants coming to the EU (Nacu 2011). To frame an issue, a group of people or a critical event tries to give it a certain meaning and interpret it so that it mobilizes potential supporters and demobilizes antagonists (Benford & Snow 2000). When it comes to marginalized groups, racialized people, people coming from lower-income countries and those fleeing wars, conflicts and natural disasters, the kind of frame used in political debates and the media can lead to marginalization and exclusion, on the one hand, and integration and belonging, on the other (Klein & Amis 2021). Different frames can be employed for different issues, and these frames can change over time (Reinecke & Ansari 2021). In their study of political elites' migration discourses on social media, Meltzer et al. (2021) show that framing migration as a security threat or issue was the most dominant frame in a number of countries in Europe, including Sweden, but, interestingly, there seems to be a difference in how the audiences of Right- and Left-leaning parties engage with this frame: Right-wingers tended to interact mostly with security-related content, while Left-wingers focused on economics and the welfare-related consequences of migration. Ample research has focused on framing migration issues in the media and the political sphere, especially in connection to the 'migration crisis' during 2015–2016, including gendered and racialized exclusionist discourses on migration as a security threat (cf. Barker 2018). However, fewer studies have focused on the frames of war-related migration due to an ongoing conflict, in particular the changes in such framing in relation to the ongoing conflict [there are a few exceptions in journalism and media studies, such as Kalfeli et al. (2023)]. During an exogenous shock such as international war or a financial crisis, political elites are likely to reframe certain issues (Subotić 2016). Since these are 'unsettled narratives' (Krebs 2015), the dominant frames might not be credible any longer (Jenne, Hawkins & Silva 2021).

A war can be framed as nationalist, material or religious (Canetti, Khatib & Rubin 2019), but also in terms of relevance to the region, historical events or even culture, which also has repercussions for how migration from the specific region is framed. Hawkins (2008) explains that the relevance and actuality of a certain war in another national context also depends on the perceived geographical and cultural proximity of the region where the war is taking place. Theoretically, thus, war-related migration can be connected to the frames of a certain conflict and how the reasons for the war are defined (Roggeband & Vliegenhart 2007). Since frames and framing of societal issues are not stable and change according to a number of factors, they can also have an impact on political attitudes and vice versa (Canetti, Khatib & Rubin 2019).

This paper focuses on the potency of wars and armed conflicts to shape the ways in which political elites frame migration both from the area in war and other countries in the war, which can lead to renegotiations of migration policies and reframing of 'deservingness' of the different migrant/diasporic groups present in the country of residence. It is at the symbolic interaction of the war, migration and political ideologies

that the framing of the conflict can significantly alter the relationship between migrant/diasporic organizing and political elites in the context of the country of residence.

Ample research has focused on migrant (non-refugee) participation in the political sphere, especially via active participation in migrant organizations (Jacobi 2021). Most of these study migrant political participation among migrants who have lived in the country of residence for some extended period of time (Jacobi 2021). However, few studies investigate how a sudden eruption of war in near proximity shapes the way political elites frame and understand migration overall. An interesting angle for understanding this threefold interaction is provided by diaspora and peace/conflict studies. Studies of diaspora and conflict transportation, autonomization and deterritorialization have been exploring wars' capacity to mobilize migrant and diasporic individuals in their countries of residence and shown that the context of country of residence matters for such mobilization (cf. Baser 2015; Féron 2017; Féron & Lefort 2019). Thus, the way the political elites of a country understand and react to a certain war might become an important aspect of framing migration and migrant mobilizations. Therefore, while extremely tragic and violent locally, certain wars have practical and discursive repercussions in other geographical spaces too.

Certain conflicts have the capacity to become symbolically deterritorialized (Rabinowitz 2000) and enter other domains and discussion. For example, the correlation between membership in the Republican party in the USA and a strong pro-Israeli stance (Oliphant 2018) shows that the meanings of war can become detached from their original source and become markers of a certain political ideology in geographically distant places. Understandings of a certain conflict as more or less relevant to a certain context can thus potentially lead to certain framings of migration policies as well as foreign relations agendas. In the case of this paper, Swedish politicians' framing of the Russian–Ukrainian War involves several factors apart from the evident horror and violence of the war taking place in Ukraine. They might use the war to further their own political agendas, as in the case of NATO membership; they can use the war to argue for migration policies relating to other non-Ukrainian migrant groups; and they might situate the Russian–Ukrainian War on par with the fight for values of freedom and democracy and compare it to other wars that are closer 'culturally,' such as the Russo-Finnish War in 1939 in the case of Sweden. Such framing can lead to clear political and practical implications for the migration policy in the country.

Framing of conflicts and wars are thus done by multiple actors: diasporic/migrant individuals and organizations, the media (national and international), and political elites. Framing is also informed by the situation on the ground and transnational patterns of interaction. In this paper, I specifically focus on the framings by political elites (debates in the Riksdag) and focus only on the context of Sweden.

BRIEF NOTE ON RUSSIAN–UKRAINIAN WAR

In March 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean Peninsula, which is an autonomous region within Ukraine. Shortly after, Russian troops backed insurgency in two eastern regions of Ukraine, Lugansk and Donetsk. The violent conflict caused the deaths of thousands and had displaced or directly affected two million people by 2016 (World Bank 2017). Two peace agreements – known as the Minsk I and Minsk II agreements – were signed in 2014 and 2015. While the failure of Minsk I was obvious already in 2014, the Minsk II agreement was officially active until 2022. In 2016, the number of large-scale battles and casualties dropped, and the conflict remained 'frozen'

until 2021. In the spring of 2021, Russia started amassing its troops along the Ukrainian borders, causing a new surge in discussions of the 'conflict in Ukraine'; however, it backed out within a few months. It was in the autumn of 2021 that 100,000 Russian troops gathered near the Ukrainian borders once again. The world media began debating the possibility of a 'real war' unravelling and how many days Ukraine could withstand in the case of a Russian invasion. On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, provoking more than eight million refugees to flee to other European countries and causing almost six million people to become displaced internally [UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2023]. The attacks on civil populations, the gruesome murders of Ukrainians and the sexual violence against women and children as well as many other horrific crimes in the Ukrainian cities Bucha and Irpin gave rise to large-scale debates on the situation in Ukraine. The number of civilian casualties is almost 22,000, with more than 8,000 of those dead. Now, it has become a full-scale war (OHCHR 2023). In this paper, I track the period of the Russian–Ukrainian War from 2014 and understand the 2022 invasion as an escalation of the war (until December 2022).

SWEDISH CONTEXT DURING 2014–2022

Sweden has been characterized for a decade now as a country at a crossroads between its perceived exceptionalism as pertaining to the value of human rights and multiculturalism and the rise of neoliberal and conservative influence (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2015). While in the post-World War II period, the Swedish model emphasized Parliament intervention in labour market politics and social policies overall, since the late 1980s, it has been gradually undergoing transformations that put individual freedom ahead of the role of the Parliament (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019). One of the focal issues that have become politicized to an extreme degree is that of migration, especially forced migration such as refugees. The time period that this study focuses on has seen a specific example of this transformation and the growing politicization of migration and asylum-seeking: a record figure of more than 160,000 asylum-seekers arrived in Sweden in 2015 (Migrationsverket 2023). Asylum-seekers from Ukraine during this period, 2000–2021, amounted to up to 1% of all the applications the Migration Agency of Sweden recorded each year (Migrationsverket 2023). However, with the eruption of full-scale war, the situation with migration from Ukraine has changed, specifically due to the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). The TPD is an EU-level measure designed in 2001 (following the Yugoslavian wars) to give temporary protection to displaced non-EU people who are fleeing their home countries in large numbers and are unable to return (European Commission 2023). The TPD was activated in March 2022 and offers unprecedented assistance and protection to Ukrainian citizens and residents who fled Ukraine after 24 February 2022 to EU countries (European Commission 2023).

In 2022, the Swedish Migration Agency received over 50,000 applications through the Temporary Protection Directive, of which less than 2,000 were Ukrainian asylum-seekers (Migrationsverket 2023). This is significantly less than the initial forecast that Sweden could expect up to 200,000 Ukrainian refugees (the forecast has since then shifted down to 80,000). Fewer than 800 Russian citizens applied for asylum in Sweden in 2022 (Migrationsverket 2023).

Before the Russian–Ukrainian War began with the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the patterns of Ukrainian and Russian migration to Sweden were similar: most of the people who moved to Sweden after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were women from both Ukraine and Russia. As of 2016, there were about 20,000 people born in Russia, and fewer than 10,000 people born in Ukraine, who were living in Sweden (SCB 2023).

Migrant organizing of Ukrainians and Russians in Sweden before 2014 took the form of typical cultural diasporic organizations that would organize cultural and religious events for their members, such as Christmas and Easter celebrations. Sometimes these organizations would collaborate with each other or through the umbrella organizations with other migrant organizations. However, with the eruption of the conflict in 2014, the patterns of the collaborations have changed; new organizations that clearly support Ukraine or Russia have been created as well in Sweden (Voytiv 2019). Since the full-scale invasion in 2022, some of the old and new organizations that have been explicitly supporting Ukraine have been reaching out to the political elites of Sweden and organizing events and demonstrations together with them (as, for example, the Ukraine Nordic Forum). One notable example is a demonstration, which was organized by one of the Ukrainian diasporic groups in Stockholm, that was held on 24 February 2023 to commemorate the date of Russia's invasion. It was exceptional that both current and previous prime ministers of Sweden used the opportunity to address the thousands of people gathered at the demonstration. Pro-Russian organizations still exist, but they do not appear in the public domain and have no interactions with the ruling political elites or civil society of Sweden overall.

Sweden as a country has been overwhelmingly supportive of Ukraine, even intensively so after February 2022: it has continuously sent military support to Ukraine since the invasion, and humanitarian aid since 2014, and has been publicly lobbying for more support for Ukraine. Its support is not confined to only symbolic gestures such as illuminating monuments with yellow and blue lights in the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Since the TPD does not give the same rights as asylum rights, Ukrainian refugees have been strongly dependent on the support of civil society organizations, both diasporic/migrant organizations existing from before 2022, and different Swedish humanitarian organizations and individual organizing.

Between 2014 and November 2022, Sweden had a social democratic parliament in alliance with the Left Party, Centre Party and the Green Party. For most of this period Stefan Löfven was the prime minister until he quit in November 2021, triggering a change in parliament. Magdalena Andersson became the new prime minister, and she chose all her cabinet ministers from her own party, the Sweden Social Democratic Party. Despite the Parliament being largely social-democratic, migration policies have been constantly tightened in Sweden (Dahlstedt & Neergaard 2019). However, the reasons for limiting migration proffered by those on the Right and those on the social-democratic side were different: while the Right frames migration as a security threat, the social democrats understand large migration as a threat to social democracy and as limiting its capacities (Barker 2018).

DATA AND METHOD

The paper uses qualitative text analysis to study the framing of the Russian–Ukrainian War and its relation to migrant/diasporic groups in the political debates of the Swedish parliament. The analysis uses open-source data, which include transcripts of the debates in the Riksdag between 2014 and 2022 that use the word Ukraine at least once. These transcripts, called protocols, are freely available to the public on the parliament website (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2023). In total, there were 50 protocols that mentioned Ukraine. The length of each protocol varied from about 35–200 pages. Each protocol was divided into different topics for discussion, as well

as answers to interpellations. Politicians from different parties in parliament could also ask each other questions, and questions could be related to issues that were not always within the topic, thus presenting a larger context of conflict, opposition and support between and among the political parties and ideologies. All the text is in Swedish. Every document has the same structure, and every politician that takes the stand addresses the parliament in the same way before addressing a certain person or issue: ‘Mr/Mrs Speaker (Fru/Herr Talman).’

As discussed earlier, the period of 2014–2022 encompasses two rounds of full parliaments, one interim parliament due to the resignation of Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and some months (October–December 2022) of the newly elected current parliament. The most notable change is the switch from Social Democratic Party rule up until November 2022 to the conservative alliance. Having this variance in the data allows me to juxtapose the change in political elites and the societal move to the Right of the spectrum of the political sphere and migration issues as connected to the Russian–Ukrainian War. That being said, this study does not focus on the specific parties’ ideological and political stances towards migration and Ukraine. It also does not specifically analyse migrants’ agency and political participation in creating the narratives on war and general migration. This, however, does not mean that the paper does not acknowledge that narratives constructed by migrant and diasporic individuals are not present in the debates. It rather aims to capture the overall framing of migration issues, and changes therein, as related to the war that is created by and within the debates between different parties.

The design of this study is a qualitative analysis of the content of the protocols when the words ‘Ukraine’, ‘migration’, ‘demonstrations’ and ‘diaspora’ are mentioned, as well as of their co-occurrence. The protocols were selected first by the time frame – all those that were available for the period January 2014–November 2022. Next, only those that contained the word ‘Ukraine’ were selected. In total, as mentioned above, there were 50 documents that fit these criteria.

Thereafter, every document was coded using four codes: ‘Ukraine’ (searching for ‘ukrain’ enabled the automatic capture of both ‘Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainian’), ‘migration’, ‘demonstration’ and ‘diaspora’ (‘diaspor’ enabled the capture of both ‘diaspora’ and ‘diasporic’). These specific codes were chosen on the basis of the research question of the study; in addition, the code ‘demonstration’ was chosen to pick up the possible communication between the political elites and diasporic/migrant organizations.

In total, this procedure yielded 1,996 sentences and paragraphs containing these four codes in the 50 documents. [Table 1](#) presents the distribution of the codes as per the three periods of the Russian–Ukrainian War. The initial coding was done with NVivo software for qualitative analysis, specifically using its word search function and automated coding based on the word specified.

	2014–2015	2016–2020	2021–2022
Ukrain(e)	109	227	838
Migration	112	412	220
Diaspor(a)	1	3	4
Demonstration	7	28	35
Total	222	730	1,097

Table 1 Distribution of the coded segments over the period under study, according to the time periods of the developments in Ukraine.

Next, I read each and every document separately and specifically looked into the paragraph that preceded the coded sentence and the paragraph that followed it to understand the context and framing of the coded segment. In cases where these paragraphs referred to something said earlier and not containing coded segments, I would return to the original question/reference for better understanding of the context. This procedure was done on all the documents and all the codes. However, it is important to note that the main interest of this study is the framing of migration, diaspora and demonstration codes in their reference to Ukraine. Therefore, only those instances where migration, demonstration and diaspora intersected with a discussion on Ukraine were analysed. The word 'diaspora' was never used in connection to Ukraine in the documents, and thus was not used in further analysis. Interestingly, the absence of the term 'diaspora' in the Ukrainian context in political debates might show that, despite its long presence in the country, the Ukrainian diaspora has remained invisible politically, and has largely been seen through the prism of migration.

The coded segments and relevant framing texts were then organized separately in a spreadsheet with the information on the document itself, such as date and serial number, and quotes that illustrated a certain framing. This kind of organization allowed me to have an overview of the different types of frames used for Ukraine and the war specifically with regard to the issues of migration, diaspora and demonstrations, which then led to the elucidation of larger themes and frames of these notions in the debates. For example, during the period 2016–2020, issues of migration were discussed more than Ukraine, while during the period 2021–2022, Ukraine was discussed almost four times more than issues connected to migration, which signals the prominence the war in Ukraine gained in the debates. In addition, migration seems to have been discussed even less than during the previous period. One important caveat to keep in mind, however, is that the documents analysed were chosen on the basis of inclusion of the term 'Ukraine'.

In the next section, I present the results of my analysis as per these larger themes and illustrate them with specific quotes and discussions found in the data. Each larger theme is discussed with a temporal perspective of the developments between 2014 and 2022 to show the dynamics of the framing of the issues.

RESULTS

FRAMING THE RUSSIAN–UKRAINIAN WAR AND ITS RELEVANCE IN FRAMING MIGRATION

As discussed in the introduction and theory section, the ways in which a war is framed in a national context can lead to specific framings of war-related migration overall. In this section, I discuss how the Russian–Ukrainian War is framed with regard to other ongoing wars and how this can implicate the framing of migration from Ukraine and other countries at war. It is interesting that different political parties in Sweden frame the war in Ukraine differently.

The debate protocols show that, by 2017, when the war had entered a protracted period with localized fighting in the eastern parts of Ukraine, it had become a point of debate for the various political parties in Sweden. For example, the parties were split on the question of which parties denounced the war in eastern Ukraine, how strongly and how often, and in cases of ambiguity, some parties were called out in the debates as supporting the Russian aggression. Both the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) and the Far-

Right party, the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), were called out multiple times during 2016–2017 to clarify their position on Ukraine, and specifically asked where they stood on the question of neutrality on the issue. Neutrality in this case was framed as a pro-Russian position. These discussions point to the ‘unsettled narrative’ of the importance of the war to Sweden and defining the enemy. This ambiguous process ended by 2022 when all the political parties in Sweden converged on a strong pro-Ukrainian view. This was also essential for situating this war’s importance to the country, and thus later leading to certain responses that came in February 2022.

By 2018, Ukraine had primarily been referred to in the questions of EU enlargement together with Turkey, Georgia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia, and what this would mean specifically for Sweden. The example of Ukraine that led the discussion to other countries was specifically challenged by the idea of what it would mean for Sweden in terms of migration within the EU, and how it would have an impact on patterns of migration to Sweden. By 2019 and until the end of 2022, debates on Ukraine were practically limited to issues of economic (2019) and war-related migration (2022), which I will discuss in more detail in the following section. Framed more as a ‘dangerous precedent’ than a threat, allowing Ukraine into the EU was understood in the debates as either a threat to a socio-democratic system with limited resources, or in relation to what it would lead to in terms of migration from other countries and whether the state would be able to handle it. Such a comparison to other countries (several of those named being countries with many internal conflicts) shows that there might be an implicit ranking of ‘deservingness,’ and before 2022, Ukrainian migrants (including refugees) did not really make the cut.

Since the escalation at the end of 2021 and the eruption of the full-scale invasion in 2022, the focus has changed. It now looks at how the war has affected the international community, and the EU and Sweden as part of it. This is especially evident in the continuous use of values and historical references to large-scale human rights violations, as well as the constitution of Russia as an imperialist state that threatens the democracy and freedom of its neighbouring countries, and the world in general. Interestingly, as if to increase the relevance of the war, comparisons to other armed conflicts and wars have been employed. Most notably, as discussed earlier, parliamentarians have been increasingly using references to the Russo-Finnish War in 1939. They have also used the Russian-Georgian War that ended in the occupation of Abkhazia in 2008, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria in Moldova as examples of the devastating results of Russian aggression and influence. These examples were used as a cautionary tale to argue for the necessity of action to stabilize the situation in Ukraine. On the other hand, simultaneously, Ukraine has been increasingly used as a tool to bring long ongoing and past conflicts to the front of the agenda:

But I want to talk about another occupation, another pain – Israeli occupation of Palestine and Palestinians’ enormous suffering in many years. It is apartheid system in Israel. In South Africa there were many critics against apartheid. In Israel there are also many critical against Israel’s actions. Exactly like in South Africa, there are two options for Israel – war or change.

– Social Democrat Party, April 2022

This change in narration using the Russian invasion of Ukraine to highlight other wars and conflicts, and not the other way around, had not appeared before 2022 and is possibly due to the escalation of the war in February 2022. Another conflict that was raised

numerous times in connection with Ukraine is the conflict between China and Taiwan, especially as related to the larger value and right of countries to self-determination:

Something that is really standing up now in the world is self-determination and we see this in Ukraine. But it does not mean that we do not want to see that in Taiwan. But there are different definitions of how to work in different regions. – Social Democratic Party (April 2022)

This dynamic of usage of one war/conflict to argue for action towards other wars/ conflicts is extremely interesting since it, first, implicitly builds a narrative of comparison and situates both wars on the same plane, and, second, the change of direction of using Ukraine as an argument for action elsewhere signals the reframing of the way the Russian-Ukrainian War is politically understood in the debates. This also has the potential to reframe the way migration from countries at war is seen. Through comparison, an implicit ranking can be made, and those deemed most deserving and in need will probably end up being the centre of attention not only in terms of peace programmes but also in terms of refugee reception.

DYNAMICS OF FRAMING MIGRATION FROM UKRAINE

Since 2014, the discussion on migration from Ukraine has been one of the most dynamic topics in the debate. My analysis shows significant shifts in migration framing between 2014–2016 and 2022. In 2014 and 2015, the number of Ukrainians fleeing the war to Sweden was relatively low, as discussed earlier in this paper. Moreover, the procedure to apply for asylum as a refugee from Ukraine was the same as for other groups, which is not the case since February 2022. However, throughout the period, there is continuous usage of comparisons when discussing migration with reference to Ukraine.

In the beginning of the period studied in this paper, that is, since 2014, Ukrainian migration was discussed in terms of internal migration within Ukraine and potential Swedish aid for internally displaced persons, and immigration to Sweden as an asylum-seeker. It is the second point that is of particular interest to this article.

‘Cecilia from China, Adel from Syria and Marina from Ukraine and others struggle to write their CV,’ claimed one politician in 2019, arguing for the need for more resources for asylum-seekers to help them in the labour market in 2019. ‘They mostly look for jobs and asylum cannot be a way for employment,’ answered a politician from the Sweden Democrats in 2020.

By 2022, these dynamics had changed, especially so with the arrival of tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees. The procedure for asylum application is different now, and while the TPD does allow Ukrainians to work, it does not give them the right to education (such as Swedish-language courses) and asylum housing. Suddenly, it became important for parties across the political spectrum to encourage Ukrainian refugees to learn Swedish to improve their chances of finding jobs.

In the spring of 2022, debates about the treatment of Ukrainian refugees vis-à-vis other groups in the Western countries were present in many media, and also played a prominent part in the debates in the Riksdag. According to the Left Party in April 2022:

I am happy about TPD for Ukrainians, but it is also very sad this has not been taken earlier for other groups that flee. When we make a difference between Ukrainian refugees and others, it shows again what is wanted to be out in the public debate and who is described as in need for protection and who are to be demonized.

Similar sentiments were voiced by other parties, except for the Far-Right one:

Migrants that are culturally not too related to us should stay here forever, while the Parliament thinks that Ukrainians should be out of here quick. This raises questions. In public debates SD was guilting as idiots and that we care for Ukrainians only because they are white and so on. However, they closed their eyes on the fact that from Ukraine come real refugees from our proximity, women and children, which simply differentiates them from earlier migrant waves that spilled over Sweden and that SD was against. Now comes obligation for job, integration and return from sources that have never put same conditions on Somalis or Iraqis.

– Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats), 2022

To argue against this narrative of proximity as the only reason for the Sweden Democrats' push to prioritize Ukrainians over other groups, the Social Democrat Party brought up the example of refugees coming from the Balkan region during the Yugoslavian wars, which the Sweden Democrats had opposed strongly at the time. They also brought up the argument of 'cultural closeness' and the Sweden Democrats' claims that the Ukrainians came from completely different cultural circles than Sweden – namely that the Ukrainians belonged to the 'Byzantine culture'.

The issue of geographical proximity has been picked up by all the participants in the debate apart from the Left Party. However, the issue of cultural proximity was pioneered by the Sweden Democrats and debated largely only by the Social Democrat Party.

The Far-Right Sweden Democrats have also referred a number of times to the gendered nature of the Ukrainian refugees – most are woman with children. The Far-Right narrative constructs a binary opposition between the 'real refugees,' i.e., women and others, usually equating them with criminals. Basically, what the Sweden Democrats want is to fill the Swedish quotas of asylum-seekers with only Ukrainian refugees, which has led to a large push-back from across the political spectrum.

Another issue widely discussed during 2022, even as early as June 2022, is the issue of 'encouragement to return'. The encouragement to return policy has been in place in Sweden since the early 1990s (Riksdagsförvaltningen 2021), and does not cater specifically to Ukrainians. Interestingly, the Far-Right perspective here is that it is wrong to encourage Ukrainians to return to their homeland in this early stage of the war. According to the Sweden Democrats, they should remain in Sweden and find work and temporary homes there. The Social Democrat Party, however, is strongly pushing for strategies to encourage the Ukrainian refugees to return.

As discussed earlier, the TPD does not offer the right to asylum, and as a result, a lot of state social support is not available to the Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, it is the civil society that has taken most of the responsibility for help with housing, language education and employment. Such outsourcing of state obligations to civil society is an interesting case for a social democratic context. The debates centre round proposals to increase support to civil society organizations in Sweden that help Ukrainians, rather than effect changes in the legal procedures related to asylum or the TPD. The Centerpartiet (the central-liberal Centre Party) acknowledges this and suggests that the parliament has to step up:

I am proud that EU and Sweden have opened their hearts to all those that are now fleeing. It has to also do with helping people live and work here.

This is something that civil society was required to take on. Now is the time that the Parliament does its own. This has to be taken with two thoughts in mind together: in the same time Putin's bombs fall over Ukraine, people from other parts of the world – Syria, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia – also need to run from war and oppression.

Interestingly, this politician also brings up other groups that seek asylum in Sweden. Implicitly, the quote suggests that other wars and conflicts have been given less attention since the invasion of Ukraine. What is of interest also is that, while acknowledging the role of the civil society in Sweden in helping the Ukrainians, the comparison with other countries in states of war or conflict does not mention legal or civil society responses, making them basically invisible. The Russian–Ukrainian War and its implications on migration are separated from the general migration debate in this narrative.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The ways in which wars around the world are framed in a specific national context has implications not only for the foreign affairs of the country but also in connection to how states legitimize their own national policies, such as migration policies. This study has shown that the meanings of a specific war can be detached and used by political elites to further their own agenda – in the case of the Russian–Ukrainian War, the discursive equating of it with past conflicts such as the Russo-Finnish War through the usage of certain loaded phrases. One example is the phrase 'Ukraine's cause is ours', which was increasingly used in the debates by multiple parties in the Riksdag starting March 2022; it mimics a similar call – 'Finland's cause is ours' – that was used during the Russo-Finnish War, and thus brings the Russian–Ukrainian War closer to 'home' in the Nordic context. In addition, the constant comparisons between different groups of refugees and asylum-seekers can build up an implicit ranking of deservingness based on several factors that are framed differently depending on the ideology of the speaker. This comparison is usually based on ideas of proximity (symbolic and geographic), real and perceived similarities of the different wars that cause dispersion (such as analysis of the war through imperialism, self-determination and oppression), and real or perceived similarities in the processes and stages of different wars. Therefore, the wars have a capacity to shape migration politics elsewhere not only in direct ways but also indirectly.

As we have seen, the framing of the Russian–Ukrainian War has changed during the period of 2014–2022, as has the framing of Ukrainian migration in 2022, despite the fact that Ukraine has been in an armed conflict since 2014. Most interestingly, since the full-scale Russian invasion began, the war has also been used to frame not only other conflicts and wars but also migration at the national level in Sweden. Used often in a seemingly unrelated way, Ukraine seems to have become the force behind an argument for political action not only with regard to its direct effects such as security and defence but also as a tool for making certain general migration-policy-related claims stronger and more valid in a time of crisis.

Finally, the relative lack of discussion on the participation of the political elites in the demonstrations and activism of Ukrainian migrant and diasporic individuals and organizations is interesting. Considering that many top politicians of Sweden, including the current prime minister and several former ones, have attended events organized by the Ukrainian diaspora, the lack of discussion of the communication between migrant organizations and the political sphere is puzzling. Instead, references to and

praise of the work of Swedish civil society were made in the Riksdag, and there was debate on how the state can support civil society. A large fraction of Swedish society has helped Ukrainian refugees when the state failed (due to the specificity of the TPD status of Ukrainians in Europe); however, no specific mention has been made of this specific group. Moreover, the work of the Ukrainian diaspora in helping in the integration, housing and schooling of Ukrainian refugees has not been mentioned, although it has been seen to be widely present. It has been incorporated into an idea of Swedish civil society, implicitly erasing the huge efforts of the diasporic organizations (and not just Ukrainian ones). Understanding migrant and diasporic activism as civil society in general removes the connection to a certain migrant group, and thus makes such activism generalizable to all, while mostly specific actors are in mind. Uniting all civil society into one group allows all the work and support these multiple and very different organizations have provided to be made to discursively disappear into a Swedish national effort, erasing any connection to the specific migrant/diasporic groups. Such discourses thus erase not only the contributions diasporas make in the national context of their country of residence; they also erase the contributions of diasporas as peacemakers in the contexts of their homelands.

To conclude, while the Swedish parliament has been unprecedentedly united when it comes to the Russian–Ukrainian War (especially so after the full-scale invasion in 2022), the multitude of divergent framings of the war (even within the larger support to Ukraine) has led to differential propositions when it comes to migration, not only from Ukraine but also other war-torn countries and regions. This article has shown a systematic erasure of the efforts of migrants and diasporas when it comes to peacemaking and contributions made towards the improvement of the conditions of the refugees. Diasporas and migrants, when put under the umbrella of civil society actors, become invisible actors in the Swedish political discourse. Further research should explore in detail the factors behind this lack of acknowledgement of diasporic mobilization in response to a war elsewhere.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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