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MERKEL EFFECT IN EUROPEAN CRISES: FROM “KOHL’S MÄDCHEN” TO “NOBODY’S GIRL”

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Abstract

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The history of European Union integration has passed through many milestones and member countries have overcome crises each time. In this context, Germany has been the most outstanding country among all member states. On the one hand, Germany has become an economic power by overcoming its historical problems, and on the other hand, it is the country that has taken responsibility for European integration. The study focuses on the Merkel era and Germany’s role in the major crises of European integration during this period. Merkel was the first name that came to mind in every major crisis in the European Union. In the study, the Euro Zone crisis and the Syrian refugee crisis were defined as the main problems of the Merkel era. These fundamental problems also attract attention because they are the most prominent topics in the literature. In this context, Merkel's political career and the literature about Merkel were mentioned first. In the following chapters, the respective crisis was discussed and Merkel's attitude toward crisis was examined. The study differs from the literature by using the concept of “Merkel effect”. As a result, it was claimed that Merkel was the most important political figure in resolving these crises.



Keywords: Germany, Merkel, Euro Zone crisis, Syrian refugee crisis.

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1. Introduction

“Difficult times bring out great leaders”

(Zakaria, 2007: 165).

It would not be wrong to claim that the European Union (EU) was used by Germany as a functional tool to become the leading country in Europe after World War II. Indeed, Germany's unique position within the EU since the beginning of integration and until today has opened economic, political, and geopolitical opportunities for the EU. The EU integration process has allowed Germany to take a leading role in Europe and on the international stage. Given the aspects that have helped Germany stand out; the first is the compatibility between the economic models of the country and the EU. The German economic models, the “*Euro*” and the “*Common Market*” systems have a high degree of similarity. Secondly, the existence of the EU is a matter of national interest for Germany and the EU is seen by Germany as a protector against external threats. The question “*Why is Germany's leadership seen as an option for the EU?*” is critical. Germany can answer this question from three points of view. First, Germany has developed a motive in its foreign policy to promote the European Union integration process. Secondly, the steps taken under German leadership to manage and resolve the Eurozone crisis in 2010, which followed the financial and economic crisis that began in the United States in 2008, are clear evidence of this. Third, Germany has emerged as the undisputed leader of the EU, especially after Brexit (Demesmay & Puglierin, 2017: 10-11).

Germany has a relatively strong political influence on the EU. German Chancellors have been heavily involved in the institutional and political structures of the EU, and some have held back. The most important names among German Chancellors in this regard were Helmut Kohl, Helmut Schmidt and Joschka Fischer. They all pioneered and led a major change and transformation in the EU and excelled in the biggest political and institutional disputes within the EU (Bulmer & Patterson, 2010: 1060). On the other hand, it is now widely recognized that the EU, unlike Germany, is experiencing a leadership crisis (Müller & Esch, 2020: 1051-1071). Europe has experienced many economic and political problems in the past and present, and the need for strong leaders in times of crisis is becoming increasingly clear. The name that should be mentioned here in connection with European politics is Angela Merkel. In 2008, Mills had predicted the following points about Merkel:

Failure is not something she knows much about. (...) She will continue to be honest and straightforward. She will continue to say what she does and do what she says. She will be self-confident, but she also will be sensitive to the needs of others. There have been times

throughout her life when she has been underestimated. Few underestimate her now (Mills, 2008: 106).

Merkel was born in West Germany on July 17, 1954 and moved to East Germany with her family. Given Merkel's educational background, one finds that she has an apolitical past. She did not play an active role in the East German government or opposition, did not attend prayer meetings despite being the daughter of a pastor, and did not participate in political events at university. She studied physics at the University of Leipzig between 1973-1978 and received her doctorate in physics in 1986. Merkel's political career began, as with other female politicians, with a portfolio for women's issues. Merkel stood out more because she was an East German Protestant than because she was a woman. What made Merkel stand out was that she had spent eight years in Kohl's cabinet learning something. In the process, Merkel achieved important successes, such as winning political debates, fighting political opponents, and cultivating close ties with the media. After Kohl's electoral defeat in 1998, Wolfgang Schäuble, the new chairman of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), appointed Merkel as secretary-general of the CDU. In the search for a new leader to save the crisis-ridden party after Schäuble was forced to resign, Merkel rose to prominence. Merkel became the 38th female prime minister in the world when she became Germany's "*first female, first eastern and first naturalist*" chancellor in November 2005 (Thompson & Lennartz, 2006: 100-106).

Merkel, Kohl's 'Little Girl' in the past, is now "*nobody's girl*" (Yoder, 2011: 360-375 see Wells, 2007: 34-37). Merkel, Germany's first female leader, has been compared to important female figures, namely Joan of Arc or Margaret Thatcher (Mushaben, 2009: 27). Given Merkel's first term, she was a different leader as she was the only woman in the Group of Eight (G8), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the EU (Wiliarty, 2008: 485). Merkel ranked first in the Forbes list of the "*Top 100 Most Powerful Women in the World,*" and she also ranked first in the following years 2006, 2008, 2009. In 2008, Merkel received the Charlemagne Prize for EU Leadership for "*her decisive leadership and outstanding contribution to the new dynamics within the EU*" (Yoder, 2011: 366).

An important indication of this is that in 2010 Merkel was awarded the King Charles Medal II by the Royal Society, a major science academy, for promoting science-based policy in Europe and worldwide (The Royal Society, 2010). Merkel's education in physics also influenced her leadership strategy. Merkel's approach to politics resembles that of a physicist who develops hypotheses, gathers information, and then draws a conclusion (Davidson-Schmich, 2011: 334). Thus, Merkel's foreign policy style reflects her political motto of "*think-*

consider-decide” or *“step-by-step”*. Merkel considers various policy recommendations and then seeks a logical solution (Yoder, 2011: 363).

Merkel seems to have taken first place on the list of *“most powerful women”* of Forbes magazine. Finally, Forbes made the following statement about Merkel in the 2019 list:

Merkel remains the de facto leader of Europe, leading the region’s largest economy after steering Germany through financial crisis and back to growth.

Her leadership is marked by her steely reserve, from standing up to Donald Trump to allowing more than a million Syrian refugees into Germany.

For now, she leads a coalition government unpopular with voters, facing continuing storms from Brexit and growing anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe (Forbes, 2021).

Foreign Policy magazine announced Merkel as *“the most powerful”* of the *“top 10 of the last 10 years”* in 2019. According to Foreign Policy:

During her 13 years in office, Angela Merkel has held together with the European project through canny pragmatism and force of will. Where other politicians might have buckled, she navigated the hazardous eurozone crisis and stood up for the rights of refugees. Along the way, Merkel also crafted a new strategic role for Germany as the political and moral leader of a fractured West. Now, in the autumn of her political career, the chancellor finds herself buffeted by rising nationalism-raising the question of whether her legacy will be celebrated or discarded” (Foreign Policy, 2021).

Countries that wanted to meet with the EU or negotiate on an issue, especially the U.S., Russia, and China, preferred to meet with Merkel first (Aktan, 2021). Despite all her successes, there are also negative comments about Merkel's leadership in the EU. Hungary, Poland, Greece, and other countries in the EU have sharply criticized Merkel for many issues, from immigration policy to the euro crisis.

2. Literature Review

Numerous books and articles have been published on Merkel. Some studies investigated Merkel’s rise in the CDU (Sheeler & Anderson, 2014; Reutter, 2006). Masch and Gabriel (2020) examined how emotional portrayals of Merkel shape citizens’ attitudes. Mushaben (2009) mentioned Merkel’s foreign policy in the context of issues, namely U.S.-Germany relations, the EU presidency, and relations with Putin. Chandler (2010) addressed Merkel’s and Sarkozy’s leadership in Europe by examining the financial crises and the types of leadership. Mushaben (2016) examined Merkel’s role as a female leader in *“majority rule”* in Germany in another study. Toygür and Benvenuti (2016) discussed the European refugee crisis and Merkel’s position in resolving it. Mushaben (2022) considered the rise and influence of female

leaders in German politics through Chancellor Angela Merkel, Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, and Secretary General of the CDU Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

There were also many comments on important issues in the Merkel era. “*Five Key Moments in Merkel’s Career*” in France 24 (2018) cited the refugee crisis and the Eurozone as two important issues. Three of the six key issues facing the EU mentioned by Rachman (2016) are Brexit, refugees, and the Euro crisis. Helms et al. (2019) examined the Merkel era through the migration and Euro crises. According to Koszel (2017), the refugee crisis is the biggest challenge for Germany in the second decade of the 21st century. Auer (2021: 19) highlighted the Eurozone crisis, the EU’s relations with Russia and Ukraine, and the refugee crisis as the most important problems facing Europe in the Merkel era. Toygür and Benvenuti (2016: 5) noted that Merkel is the unelected leader of Europe. This leadership role became evident first in the Eurozone crisis and then in the refugee crisis. In both crises, she took important steps toward resolution. Mushaben (2016: 15) examined that Merkel’s second government in 2009-2013 had to deal with the problems of the debt crisis in Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Greece, and the waves of migration caused by the Arab Spring. Van Esch (2017) discussed Merkel’s leadership in the Euro crisis by comparing her to Alexis Tsipras. Hertner (2022) analysed the Merkel era by focusing on the discourses and policies of the CDU/CSU on immigration.

When we look at the concept of the “*Merkel effect*” put forward in the study, the “*Merkel effect*” was only used as a headline by Kurbjuweit (2014) and was not mentioned in the article. The term “*Merkel effect*” was also used by Schultheis (2017) in connection with elections in Germany and competition between political parties. However, this study attempts to establish the concept of the “*Merkel effect*” by choosing the Eurozone and the Syrian refugee crisis as European crises. Thus, the study aims to shed light on Merkel’s role in two major crises in recent European history². In this context, it aims to contribute to the literature on Merkel and German-EU relations by introducing the concept of the “*Merkel effect*”. Within the framework of this concept, it is possible to state that, as Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, G. (2022: 13) points out, “(...) *this was also due to the fact that hardly anyone could dispute the chancellor’s role as a ‘shining light’, as a beacon of hope and as Europe’s new superstar*”.

² The concept of “*Merkel effect*” in the context of Syrian refugees was presented by the authors as a summary paper at the International Symposium on the Future of Migration held on 14-15 April 2022 in Batman/Turkey.

3. Merkel’s Role in the Euro Crisis

While the architecture of the Eurozone was shaped by the Maastricht Treaty, the EU monetary structure was inspired by the German financial structure. It is well known that the Bundesbank model is taken as an example. This model is known as the “*German Stability Model*” and brought strict economic regulatory obligations to countries that became members of the monetary union. Applications and regulations such as the prohibition of sovereign debt financing and the prevention of bailouts by preventing financial assistance under crisis conditions and the provision of permanent supervision under the “*Stability and Growth Pact*” were incorporated into the monetary structure of the system under pressure from Germany. Germany’s actions during this period served the purpose of holding Europe together after the Cold War. Therefore, Germany’s hegemonic effect on the EU monetary system is one of the main topics (Krotz & Schild, 2013: 185).

Although the EU’s monetary architecture is based on the German stabilization system, the financial and economic crisis in the Eurozone in 2008-2009 (European Parliament, 2019) destroyed all the financial wealth that the EU had built up since the 1990s. Germany once again came to the fore during the Euro crisis, ensuring the implementation of necessary reforms within the framework of an ordoliberal policy and demonstrating to the debtor states the necessity of the internal reform phase by assuming the necessary economic responsibility. Emerging weaknesses of the Eurozone were also reformed. The crisis necessitated the “*Banking Union*” in the EU and Germany became the only saviour power of the monetary union. Financial integration deepened with the adoption of basic fiscal rules such as a balanced budget, debt brake mechanisms, and an automatic correction system in the Euro crisis. Germany’s most salient feature in monetary affairs is the fact that the regulatory frameworks or institutional structures formed at the EU level are modelled on Germany’s regulations and Germany’s willingness to delegate authority within this framework (Krotz & Schild, 2013: 185).

When the EU debt crisis erupted, Merkel became a prominent leader among EU leaders. Agreement on a large financial recovery program to be implemented by Germany, the EU’s largest economy, led Merkel to pay a high political price for her involvement in the EU. The loans transferred by the EU and the IMF to bankrupt economies in the Eurozone were granted to member countries with the promise of economic reforms. In such a situation, the Chancellor pointed out the importance of exceptional measures needed in exceptional situations and reminded that debt reduction and ensuring sustainability are crucial (Pühringer, 2015: 6).

Merkel repeatedly stressed the importance of the euro during the European debt crisis, saying, “*If the euro fails, Europe fails*”. In doing so, Merkel emphasized the importance of the EU currency for Europe. In this context, she encouraged other EU members to take serious steps to help Greece and the Eurozone recover economically (Schild, 2013: 28). According to Merkel:

It is up to us to secure the future of this success story and to leave an intact Europe to our children and grandchildren (...) Stabilizing the euro, is the central task of this legislative session. (...) The euro is much, much more than a currency (...) The euro is the guarantee of a united Europe. If the euro fails, then Europe fails (Spiegel International, 2011).

When the crisis erupted in 2008, Germany deployed a 480-billion-euro bailout fund to respond quickly to the financial crisis. By 2009, the cost of the bailout fund to Germany was 3.1 of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and the crisis measures included a scheme to reduce capital requirements for banks to transfer financial assets deemed toxic. In line with the Maastricht economic criteria principle of not bailing out euro countries, the Merkel government faced the dilemma of either foregoing the scheme it had put in place for German banks or making the arrangements for a direct bailout. Merkel’s actions in the first phase of the Greek crisis led to conflicts with key German banks, and she flatly rejected the offer by Deutsche Bank’s CEO to support Greece with a 30-billion-euro loan when she visited Greece in 2010. Also in 2010, Merkel argued that a bailout package for Greece was not necessary because Greece’s bankruptcy had not been predicted. But Greece’s situation deteriorated rapidly in 2010 and began to affect eurozone countries (Thompson, 2015: 858).

Referring to the rapid deterioration of the situation of Greece and Ireland and the creation of a stable structure in the Eurozone against possible future crises, Merkel stressed that no EU member affected by the current crisis will be left alone. However, the Chancellor pointed out that despite the economic difficulties of member countries, the euro is a crisis-proof currency (Deutsche Welle, 2010) Merkel also said that:

No one in Europe will be left alone, no one in Europe will be abandoned (...) Europe succeeds when it acts together and, I would add, Europe succeeds only when it acts together (...) It is undeniable that some eurozone countries face difficult challenges but it is also undeniable that the euro has shown itself to be crisis-proof (Zuvela & Impey, 2010).

Most of the criticism of Merkel was related to her failure to intervene in the crisis in time and ignoring it, as well as her firm stance on Greece and other countries. However, most of the complaints against Merkel were unrealistic. Merkel’s approach to the euro crisis is understandable, especially considering the limited and legal constraints imposed on the

chancellor by German politics. As stated in Article 125 of the TFEU, the “*no-bailout clause*” to be implemented in the first 10 years of the monetary union, the difference between German and Greek bonds that started to widen after 10 years, the end of the grand coalition in Germany and the calling of new elections in 2009, the emergence of the fact that Greece would not be able to get out of the crisis on its own and the clarification of the need for a bailout in 2010, Thomas de Maiziere suddenly replacing the German Finance Minister Schauble, the German political mechanisms “Bundesrat” (*House of Representatives*) and “Bundesverfassungsgericht” (*Federal Constitutional Court*) opposing the bailout and their uncertain approaches, the involvement of the Bundestag in the EU resolution process with a decision of the “Bundesverfassungsgericht” accepted as a “*constitutional debt brake*” for the Lisbon Treaty, and such factors led Merkel to act like a “*Cunctatrix*” during this period. But when did Merkel gain the upper hand in the euro crisis? With the stabilization of the grand coalition in Germany and the acceptance of the policies that Mario Draghi wanted to impose, a deliberate stance by Germany and Merkel turned into a proactive approach (Zimmermann, 2014: 325-326, 329).

The prevailing view is that Merkel has taken an important leadership role in the euro crisis (Sheeler & Anderson 2014: 475). During the Eurozone crisis, Germany performed better than the other EU countries. This situation clearly shows that Merkel is once again the “*Crownless Queen*” of the EU during the euro crisis. Germany has provided money to the crisis-ridden weak EU countries in return for some pretty tough reforms. The “*Crownless Queen*” was heavily criticized for this stance, and Germany’s attitude toward Greece, whose economy has collapsed, caused Merkel to be criticized as if she carried Hitler’s soul (Gathmann et al., 2020).

The most interesting move Merkel made during the euro crisis was her veto of “*Eurobonds*” for the Eurozone. The idea of “*Eurobonds*” lost its validity with Merkel’s declaration and, in parallel, the German government’s approach was also shaped after Merkel. The German government did not grant the “*European Financial Stabilization Facility*” and the “*European Stability Mechanism (ESM)*” the necessary authorization for banking operations, thus blocking unlimited access of eurozone member states to money via the European Central Bank. Germany initially pursued the risk mitigation approach and only then considered the introduction of risk-sharing funds, such as “*Eurobonds*”. Germany built a financial wall for the application of the “*Single Resolution Fund*” from the Banking Union and targeted the use of ESM funds. The German approach of reducing risk first was accepted by the Netherlands and Finland (Schild, 2020: 1081).

Under hegemonic stability, Merkel is considered to have taken the lead in both the Lisbon Treaty and the Eurozone crisis. During the phases in which decisions were made about the future and strategic direction of the integration process, the chancellor and the finance ministry played the role of the German foreign ministry. Merkel was expected to take a leadership role, and after carefully weighing all ideas, she preferred to compromise (Bulmer & Paterson, 2013: 1398). Germany's leadership role in the eurozone crisis was evident in the intensification of financial integration. The drafting and signing of the financial agreement were accomplished under Germany's leadership, and the "*Stability and Growth Pact*" was strengthened (Otero-Iglesias, 2014: 9). In the Merkozy³ era, the demarcation and different approaches between France and Germany stood out. In the early stages of the Greece crisis, the Chancellor acted much more cautiously than other partners and took control of and shaped the crisis. Subsequently, the Chancellor sought to establish a culture of stability in the eurozone by activating Germany's ordoliberal and traditional economic understanding and principles in the eurozone (Bulmer, 2014: 1259).

Merkel's statement "*failure of the euro will be the failure of the EU*" became a motto during the euro debt crisis, showing Merkel's leadership. Merkel opposed financial aid to member countries in the early stages of the crisis, but later supported the EU bailout fund and the EU central bank's bond-buying programs, allowing her to take full control of the process. Merkel explained that as a result of such a major crisis, the EU is going through a new process in which it is turning to new formations. It is widely recognized that Merkel plays a key role in the euro crisis (Riegert, 2013).

Merkel has prepared a 7-way plan to solve the euro debt crisis. When East Germany and West Germany were united, the plan that was successful in integrating East Germany was implemented by Merkel in the Euro debt crisis. Instead of creating Eurobonds, Merkel wanted to reduce the level of austerity and increase economic vitality. She created small economic regions based on the Chinese model, increased investment in renewable energy, promoted microenterprises with low taxes, combined apprenticeships, and vocational training, accelerated business start-ups, created opportunities to privatize state-owned enterprises, and relaxed employment protection. The measures were seen by Merkel as restoring economic dynamism and increasing competitiveness in the eurozone and the EU. This plan was approved

³ The term was used to express Franco-German cooperation (Merkel-Sarkozy) in the term between 2010 2012. See (Schoeller, 2018).

at the 2011 Intergovernmental Conference as part of Merkel’s plan to create a fiscal union in addition to a monetary union (European Council, 2011; Amadeo, 2020).

Thomas Piketty, Jeffrey D. Sachs, Heiner Flassbeck, Dani Rodrik and Simon Wren-Lewis’s letter to Merkel in 2015 made the following call:

To Chancellor Merkel our message is clear; we urge you to take this vital action of leadership for Greece and Germany, and also for the world. History will remember you for your actions this week. We expect and count on you to provide the bold and generous steps towards Greece that will serve Europe for generations to come (Piketty et al., 2015).

During the crisis, Merkel did not hesitate to express her belief in the euro and the ideas that link the existence of the euro and the EU. Under Merkel's leadership, important steps were taken to address the EU debt crisis:

We must develop the European Union's structure further. That does not mean less Europe, but more. That means creating a Europe that ensures that the euro has a future, (...) The euro is more than a currency. It is the symbol of Europe's unification. It is the symbol for half a century of freedom and peace...Now we have to make sure that Europe will emerge strengthened from this crisis (The Guardian, 2011).

4. Merkel’s Role in the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Germany is a country that has been closely associated with migration throughout its history. Historical examples such as the wave of migration during the World War II, the guest workers in the 1960s, and the fall of the Berlin Wall illustrate this. The influx of refugees in 2015 was also one of the most important turning points in the immigration debate.

The Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany -Article 16a (Right to Asylum) “grants victims of political persecution an individual right to asylum”. The right has “a high value and is an expression of Germany’s willingness to fulfil its historical and humanitarian obligation to accept refugees” (The Federal Minister of the Interior, 2020). Merkel made the following comments in 2007: “The government's foreign and security policy is built on values. (...) Human rights and economic interests are one side of the same coin and must never be in conflict” (Dempsey & Bennhold, 2007). It is necessary to consider this statement in the context of Merkel’s handling of refugees.

While migration was not a major issue for the EU in 2014, a year later it became the most important issue of 2015. The refugee crisis, which began in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011, reached a critical stage in 2015. In this short period, Merkel emerged as one of the leading figures in the European migration crisis. Compared to 2014, when the number of immigrants trying to come to Germany had increased fivefold, she called for a common European solution

to the immigration problem. In this process, Merkel's policy can be seen as "*a mixture of realpolitik and solidarity*" (Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016: 1-2).

The refugee crisis originating from Syria is a major issue for European countries. On August 25, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees decided that people from Syria should be exempt from EU rules on immigration and asylum. Accordingly, Merkel and Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann agreed to temporarily suspend the Dublin Agreement for refugees. This allowed refugees to come to Germany at a later date. The fact that more refugees than expected arrived in Germany led to strong reactions against Merkel's government (Koszel, 2017: 172-173). Merkel, who visited a refugee camp in Saxony in August 2015, was met with great anger and accused of being a traitor for allowing Muslims into the country. Despite this, Merkel continued to campaign for Germany to open up and showed her determination with the slogan "*we can do this*" (Wir schaffen das) (Helms et al., 2019: 358). Merkel's "*open-door policy*" towards Syrian refugees in August 2015 created two camps in Europe. On the one hand, the Visegrad group, especially Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, insisted that Europe needed to build fences and walls to stop the flow of migrants; on the other hand, the other camp, led by Merkel, rejected this idea, saying that this would trigger a humanitarian catastrophe and leave Greece alone in its fight against the migrant crisis (Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016: 2).

Merkel's refugee policy was criticized and supported by the media and the public. Germany's request for help from other countries was also ignored. EU member states either refused to accept refugees or did not want to take any initiative on the refugee issue. Throughout this mess, Meiritz (2015) argues, Merkel was Europe's moral leader in the refugee crisis. Time magazine named Merkel Person of the Year in 2015 for her leadership on the refugee issue and the Eurozone crisis. Time magazine justified this as follows:

(...) The year 2015 marked the start of Merkel's 10th year as Chancellor of a united Germany and the de facto leader of the European Union, the most prosperous joint venture on the planet. By year's end, she had steered the enterprise through not one but two existential crises, either of which could have meant the end of the union that has kept peace on the continent for seven decades. The first was thrust upon her-the slow-rolling crisis over the euro, (...) The second was a thunderclap. In late summer, Merkel's government threw open Germany's doors to a pressing throng of refugees and migrants; a total of 1 million asylum seekers are expected in the country by the end of December. It was an audacious act that, in a single motion, threatened both to redeem Europe and endanger it, testing the resilience of an alliance formed to avoid repeating the kind of violence tearing asunder the Middle East by working together. (...) (Vick, 2015).

According to Helms et al. (2019: 359), Merkel's three decisions in the refugee crisis were major turning points. First, Germany accepted nearly one million refugees and decided that

these refugees could enter the workforce. The second decision is the suspension of the EU's Dublin Agreement, which requires refugees to register in the first EU country they enter. This will allow refugees to come directly to Germany. Refugees, European countries facing an influx of refugees and the European Commission welcomed Germany's suspension of the agreement, saying it strengthens European solidarity. The third decision is the broader interpretation of the German Basic Law to accept more refugees.

Due to the reactions of the German people and the EU, Merkel's moral stance has transformed over time into hard political decisions to repel refugees. Merkel's proposal to distribute refugees among EU countries was also met with rejection by many EU countries. The reaction of EU countries to the proposal also reinforced the idea of stemming the flow of migrants. In this process, Turkey's continued consideration in solving the refugee problem became a widely accepted demand. Therefore, Merkel entered into a very close relationship with Turkey. With an agreement signed between the EU and Turkey in 2013 (Turkey-European Union readmission agreement), the flow of immigrants to Europe was stopped. Issues such as opening new chapters, updating the customs union, and financial aid for refugees are included in this agreement (European Council, 2016). Merkel's initiatives played the most important role in reaching this agreement (Traynor, 2016). Since these issues were promised to Turkey, the agreement was a turning point in solving the refugee problem.

Merkel has seen Turkey as an important partner in solving the refugee crisis, she has made many visits to Turkey to discuss the crisis, and to solve the crisis with Turkey, she has promised that there will be progress in Turkey's EU accession process. Merkel has managed to deal with the refugee crisis thanks to her cooperation with Turkey. Therefore, Rachman (2016) said, *“Merkel has undoubtedly made her share of mistakes, especially in the refugee crisis. But there is no other European leader who has the authority and patience to forge the necessary agreements to keep the EU together”*.

Merkel received the 2022 Nansen Refugee Award from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for aiding and integrating more than 1.2 million refugees and migrants into society in 2015-2016 (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). Merkel's award demonstrates the importance and success of her refugee policy.

5. Conclusion

The financial and economic crisis that erupted in the U.S in 2008 has turned out to be a debt crisis in the EU. Merkel was the only head of government who sacrificed herself politically for the EU during the EU debt crisis, so Germany, the EU's largest economy, was heavily burdened economically under the bailout program and paved the way for economic aid to bankrupt EU countries. Merkel linked financial aid to economic reform programs and ensured that serious austerity policies were implemented in the bankrupt EU member states. Although Merkel has been compared to Hitler for her actions during the EU debt crisis process, no EU member state was expelled from the eurozone because the economic costs to the weak member states were too high. Merkel's slogan during the crisis was that the failure of the euro meant the failure of the EU.

The migration issue can be considered the most important non-European problem in the history of EU integration. While Germany was dealing with the refugee crisis, it received serious reactions from both the German population and EU member states. Merkel, who was considered a hero by the refugees, started to take tougher measures against the refugees in time. The refugee crisis was solved by an agreement with Turkey. Merkel played a key role in reaching this agreement.

The debates about Merkel's handling of the crisis were interesting. While Merkel was sometimes referred to as the "*Empress of Europe*", she was also sometimes referred to as a "*Swabian housewife*" (Deutsche Welle, 2020). The chancellor's success in German politics has been undisputed since the 2000s. As a European leader, Merkel is the only one who has stepped up to the plate in all of the Union's crises. Although the solutions she has offered have often been heavily criticized, no other European leader has succeeded in finding such clever solutions to the EU's problems and making a name for herself as she has. Merkel's leadership has been controversial in the EU. Her solution to the refugee crisis was heavily criticized by EU member states, and Greeks blamed Merkel for her handling of the economic crisis they faced. The French and Italians disliked Germany's approach to economic austerity and taking responsibility. Merkel offered a solution in all circumstances and the solutions offered somehow held the EU together. But the EU has recently gone through a rather severe and serious crisis and the need for a leader like Merkel has certainly become a necessity (Rachman, 2016).

Merkel’s effectiveness in the crises discussed in the study confirms the concept of the “Merkel effect” that the study attempts to uncover. Therefore, the concept of the “Merkel effect” can be seen as an explanatory concept for European integration in the Merkel era. However, it should be noted that when Merkel came to power in 2005, Germany was known as “*the sick of Europe*”, but at the end of her term, Germany became the leading power in Europe. After all, after a strong leader like Merkel, the future of Germany or the EU remains uncertain (Strategic Comments, 2019: iv-vi). In this context, the question remains: Is it right to entrust Europe to just one person?

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