THE POTENTIAL FOR INTENSIFYING AUSTRIA'S OPPOSITION TO SCHENGEN ENLARGEMENT

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Abstract
During the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meeting on December 8-9, 2022, Austria opposed the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen area, citing immigration-related reasons. In this context, taking into account the European Parliament's resolution on the political motivation but also the emergence of a new conflict in the Middle East (Gaza Strip) with the potential to increase the number of immigrants to Europe, we consider it necessary to study the potential for intensifying Austria's opposition to Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area. This paper aims to be a longitudinal study that will provide an x-ray of the social, economic, political and security environment in Austria in order to determine the Vienna Chancellery's appetite for strengthening the discourse against the Schengen enlargement and the foundations of this discourse. The period of the study was chosen between 2018-2023, as this period presents significant particularities from a global and European security and migration perspective, namely: the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan (2021) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022).

Keywords: *Highly skilled immigrants; national security; artificial intelligence, regional and international security.*

JEL Classification: *F15, O52*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to statements adopted in the European Parliament, the rejection of the two countries was made "without any legal justification related to the accession criteria", with Austria's position being " motivated by domestic national political campaigns rather than the actual accession criteria". Austria's position has come at a complicated moment for the situation in Europe, where flows of immigrants from conflict (Syria) and post-conflict (Afghanistan) states have been compounded by flows of immigrants from Ukraine, following the invasion of this country by the Russian Federation.

In 2017, through an econometric gravity study Felbermayr (2018) show that an important step towards facilitating the movement of people, goods and services across intra-European borders is the Schengen Agreement. According to the authors Schengen increased trade by about 2.81 percent on average, with a greater impact of trade creation for services than for goods. However according to some Frank Schimmelfennig (2018) the European Union's integration efforts of the 1990s, including the euro and Schengen, have faced significant problems due to their fundamental similarities and external shocks. These crises politicized European integration, revealed institutional weaknesses and triggered confrontations between governments. On the other hand, if the Schengen crisis has not increased integration, the euro crisis has. These disparities can be explained by a neofunctionalist interpretation that emphasizes supranational capacity and transnational interconnectedness. Studying the issue of border security some authors (Ceccorulli, 2019) point out that the EU started the process of collective securitization of the Schengen area in response to the 2015 wave of migration from North Africa and the Middle East. In addition to the political division and overburdened host country infrastructure, the accidental reintroduction of border restrictions by some member states contributed to the situation. In order to manage tense relations between member states and maintain the EU's core achievement, the security discourse in EU publications has placed a strong emphasis on the need to return to normality and Schengen. As expected, the measures put in place in response to the securitization of the Schengen area did not violate the EU's normal rules or its current migration and asylum policies. The conclusion of the article highlights that it is important to recognize and consider the normative aspect of this collective securitization.

Aiming at comparing the frequency of human trafficking in adjacent Schengen countries, DiRienzo and Das (2017) investigate the free movement of people across borders and conclude that it reduces transportation costs and obstacles for traffickers and gives them access to information about the topography, demand and policing

of the surrounding countries. This hypothesis is tested using a measure of spatial autocorrelation called the Moran index. Findings indicate a distinct association between nations adjacent to the Schengen area, as the Moran index is both positive and significant. Another study conducted in 2020 (De Somer, 2020) shows that for more than four years the EU Schengen area has been in crisis. Strengthening internal border controls, intensifying police inspections in border areas as alternatives, and linking Schengen entry to collaboration and good governance are the three current EU policy possibilities. However, the third possibility is not considered realistic due to legal and political constraints. The authors point out that although there are significant caveats to consider, the first two possibilities have greater validity. Focusing on the idea of the security community (SC), some authors (Alkopher & Blanc, 2017) investigate the destabilizing effects of immigration threat perceptions on the Schengen region. This implies that these views may trigger a security conspiracy for SC nations, eroding mutual trust and a sense of common identity and pushing states to abandon cooperative norms in favor of unilateral defense measures. Using evaluative markers from the SC literature, the essay experimentally demonstrates how these views work against the Schengen system. Future studies should focus on the SC and desecuritization literature that addresses group identities and trust in challenging times.

The potential for intensifying Austria's opposition to Schengen enlargement could be influenced by regional economic and social tensions, and the use of advanced technologies, such as recommendation systems-modeling abusive clauses in e-commerce, could become relevant for analyzing and preventing possible information manipulation that could fuel such restrictive positions (Dragomir, et al., 2021). Nikolic and Pevcin (2022) argue that the reintroduction of border restrictions was prompted by the 2.4 million asylum applications received by EU Member States as a result of the migration crisis. As a result, the Schengen open borders agreement has been temporarily suspended. The paper suggests a fully operational Common European Asylum System (CEAS), based on a unified Asylum System and a centralized European institution, to strengthen the sustainability of the Schengen Agreement. The authors use zero-sum phenomena and public goods theory to explain the asymmetric integration of asylum policy.

Austria's opposition to Schengen enlargement could be amplified by complex political and economic factors, and the integration of advanced analytical tools based on artificial intelligence could facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of decision-making and the implications for regional policies (Dragomir & Alexandrescu, 2017). Könönen (2023) shows that in migration studies, entry bans - which are a component of the Return Directive and the Single European Border Regime - are often ignored. The author conducts a study that explores how entry bans affect the mobility options of non-citizens, complicate their regularization process and penalize and deregulate travel within Europe. It bases its analysis on immigration detention systems in Finland. National entry limits appear to have little impact in limiting unwanted movement within the Schengen area, despite being closely linked to crime control measures.

A study (Ștefănel et al., 2023) examines the rhetoric of Euroscepticism in Eastern Europe, particularly in Romania and Bulgaria, following the veto of their Schengen membership applications. By examining the media's influence on the issue, the research attempts to fill the knowledge gap on the subject. According to the study, the media has diminished Euroscepticism by characterizing the decision not to join Schengen as regrettable, unjust, unreasonable and unfortunate. The results show how the media minimized Euroscepticism while promoting European integration efforts.

In this context, taking into account the European Parliament's resolution on the political motivation but also the emergence of a new conflict in the Middle East (Gaza Strip) with the potential to increase the number of immigrants to Europe, we consider it necessary to study the potential for intensifying Austria's opposition to Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area.

II.   RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper is intended as a longitudinal study to provide an x-ray of the social, economic, political and security environment in Austria in order to determine the Vienna Chancellery's appetite for strengthening the discourse against the Schengen enlargement and the foundations of this discourse. The Schengen area abolishes internal border controls between member states. Austria's opposition could mean delays or difficulties in the implementation of this principle, which could affect Romania's ability to manage and monitor the flow of people effectively at its borders. Integration into Schengen implies close cooperation in the area of security and justice between Member States and Austria's opposition could influence this process of cooperation, including the exchange of information and coordination of actions to combat cross-border crime and terrorism.

As Romania has a long and important border in the eastern part of the European Union, integration into Schengen could strengthen the security of this border, ensuring a more efficient control of these borders and preventing illegal or unauthorized entries into the Schengen area, while Austria's opposition could delay or compromise the implementation of the necessary measures to secure this border. We can state that the opinions and positions of Schengen Member States, including Austria, may influence Romania's perception and positioning

within the European Union and internationally. A persistent refusal by Austria could affect Romania's prestige and its ability to actively contribute to common security policies. The Vienna Chancellery's vote of no-confidence in Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area was determined by several main factors:

1. **Technical criteria not met**: Austria argued that Romania has not yet met all the technical criteria necessary to join the Schengen area, including border security, correct application of Schengen legislation in the field of security and justice, and administrative efficiency in managing migration flows.
2. **Security concerns**: Austria's opposition has highlighted security concerns regarding the management of Romania's external borders, in particular the EU's eastern border. This includes concerns about the control of illegal migration and cross-border organized crime.
3. **Domestic political climate**: Some political oppositions in Austria have used this issue to attract domestic political support, especially in the context of concerns about migration in Europe and its impact on security and social cohesion.
4. **Resistance to Schengen enlargement**: Austria has been among the Member States that have shown a certain reluctance to extend the Schengen area to the countries that joined the EU after 2004. This sometimes reflects a concern to maintain adequate border control and to protect Austria's economic and security interests.

The period of the study was chosen between 2018-2023, as this period presents significant particularities from a global and European security and migration perspective, namely: the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan (2021) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (February 2022).

In choosing the parameters, we took into account the categories of factors that are likely to influence the government decision. For this purpose, we have identified objective parameters (which relate to the quantifiable evolution of social and economic phenomena) and a set of subjective parameters (which represent the quantifiable evolution of phenomena related to individual and group perception). These parameters are:

✓ Objective parameters

    1. The economic factor
    2. Demographic factor
    3. Security factor (criminality)

✓ Subjective parameters

    4. The social factor
    5. The political factor

Parameters assessment

Immigration can have a profound impact on government decisions in different policy areas. The influence of immigration on governmental decisions is multi-faceted and can be observed in several ways. Figure 1, using Eurostat data, shows the evolution of migrants in Austria compared to Romania and Bulgaria (Eurostat, 2023).
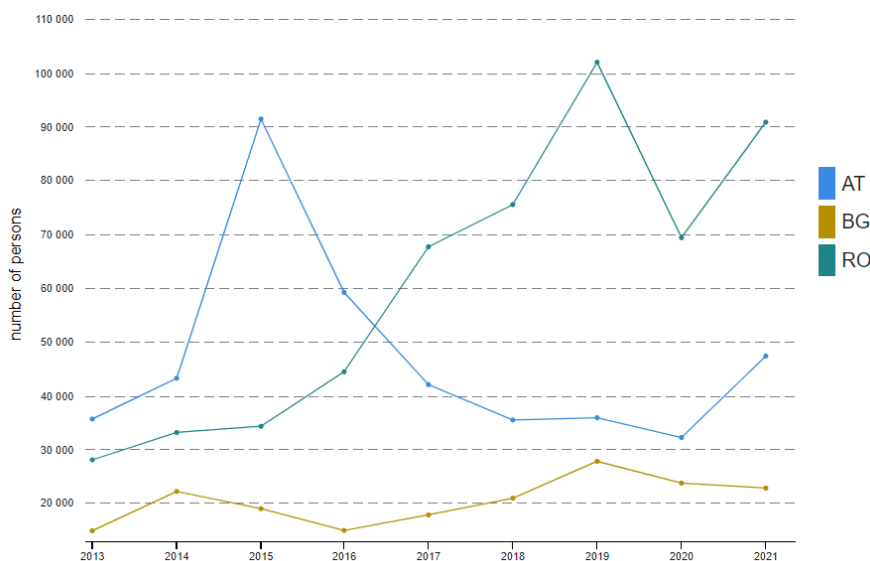
Figure 1. Comparative evolution of migrants in Austria, Bulgaria and Romania
Source: Prepared by authors based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2023)

The economic factor (EF) is multifaceted. First and foremost is the needs of the labor market. Immigration policies are often shaped by economic considerations, such as addressing labor market needs. Governments may design policies to attract skilled workers or to fill gaps in particular industries facing labor shortages. Similarly, unemployment rates influence government decisions related to or driven by immigration. The provision of public services, such as health care, education and social assistance, can be influenced by immigration. Governments may adjust the allocation of resources to meet the needs of a diverse population, including immigrants, which can put pressure on national budgets. For this reason, in our study the unemployment rate has been chosen as the main economic indicator influencing Austrian government decisions that are motivated by/directly or indirectly aimed at immigration.

The data collected reflect the unemployment rate in Austria over the period 2018-2023 and were collected from the source (Statista, 2024).

✓ The demographic factor involves consideration of several aspects. When studying government decisions or policies, the demographic factor is often taken into account, as it can help to understand decisions made in relation to potential disparities or specific needs within different demographic groups. To this end, a number of indicators were selected for the reference period that were considered to be relevant to the demographic factor respectively: Number of immigrants to Austria from Middle Eastern countries;
✓ Total inflow of immigrants to Austria during the reference period;
✓ Number of Palestinian refugees worldwide;
✓ Nominal non-EU population established in Austria.

The sources from which the data was collected are the European Union (European Commission, 2024b) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024).

Security factor (SF). Immigration policies can be influenced by national security considerations. Immigration decisions can be influenced by law enforcement priorities but also by issues such as crime rates, illegal immigration, human trafficking and organized crime. With this in mind, open sources were analyzed to identify the most common crimes associated with immigrants on European territory, with the results indicating that the most common crimes (and with the greatest impact at attitudinal and perceptual levels) were violent and property crimes. Thus, using the resources provided by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024), values were selected for the following types of crimes committed in Austria: assaults (rape, assault), homicide (international, i.e. only those committed by foreign nationals), robbery, burglary, burglary of private dwellings, theft and car theft.

The social factor. The impact of immigration on public opinion can influence government decisions. Politicians may respond to public sentiment on immigration issues, and government policies may be shaped by political considerations. Considering these aspects, the Austrian country fact sheets attached to the European Commission's annual Eurobarometer reports (European Commission, 2024a) were analyzed and selected from which the statistical values of the answers to the following questions were selected:

✓ Immigration the main problem facing Austria;
✓ Attitudes against EU enlargement;
✓ Positive attitude towards a common European asylum system/common migration policy;
✓ Attitudes against a common European asylum system/common migration policy.

The political factor. Immigration issues can become prominent during election campaigns. Political parties may formulate policies or take positions on immigration to attract voters. Also, the public themes that emerge as a result of migrant waves may favor or disfavor political parties whose political agendas may be congruent or contradictory to the general public interest. In order to assess this factor, the political spectrum in Austria was analyzed and the following relevant political parties (with parliamentary representation) were identified (source: Parties and Elections in Europe: The database about parliamentary elections and political parties in Europe, by Wolfram Nordsieck, accessed at (Wolfram Nordsieck, 2024):

In government

✓ The Austrian People's Party (in German Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) is a conservative, center-right political party in Austria. It is currently in government together with GRUNE, the Greens - Green Alternative;
✓ GRUNE - (German: Die Grünen - Die Grüne Alternative), is a green political party in Austria. The party was founded in 1986 under the name "Green Alternative" (Grüne Alternative), following the merger of the more conservative Vereinte Grüne Österreichs (United Greens of Austria VGÖ, founded in 1982) and the more progessive Alternative Liste Österreichs (Alternative.) List Austria, ALÖ, founded in 1982). In addition to ecological issues such as environmental protection, the Greens also campaign for minority rights and advocate a social-ecological (ökosozial) tax reform. Their core values according to their 2001 statute are: "direct democracy, non-violence, ecology, solidarity, feminism and self-determination".

Opposition
- ✓ The Freedom Party of Austria (in German Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs; FPÖ) is a right-wing or far-right party in Austria that promotes anti-immigrationism, anti-Islamism and Euroscepticism;
- ✓ The Austrian Social Democratic Party (in German Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ) is a center-left party;
- ✓ NEOS - New Austria and Liberal Forum (German: NEOS - Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum) is a liberal political party. It was founded as NEOS - New Austria in 2012. In 2014, NEOS merged with the Liberal Forum and adopted its current name.

The analysis of the data collected (Figure 1) revealed a tree with a marginal party (NEOS) at the center of the tree, with a voting intention of around 10%, strongly supported by GRUNE (the governing party), which is currently also around 10% (11% in 2022 and 9% in 2023).

Following the predictive simulation, as we observe in Fig. 2, the Random Tree algorithm has the advantage of quickly building a tree based on feature submultiplier selection of the objective parameters: economic factor, demographic factor and security factor. The number of features changed according to the value of the *information gain* parameter of the classification in correlation with social and political factors. The collected data are passed through the tree from the root to the leaf, the final leaf being the one whose content has the final prediction.

The NEOS party, although a small party, managed to influence a short-term political decision at government level by taking into account the values and beliefs of the population, a population reluctant to immigration - despite the demographic policies of Austria, a country with an ageing population.
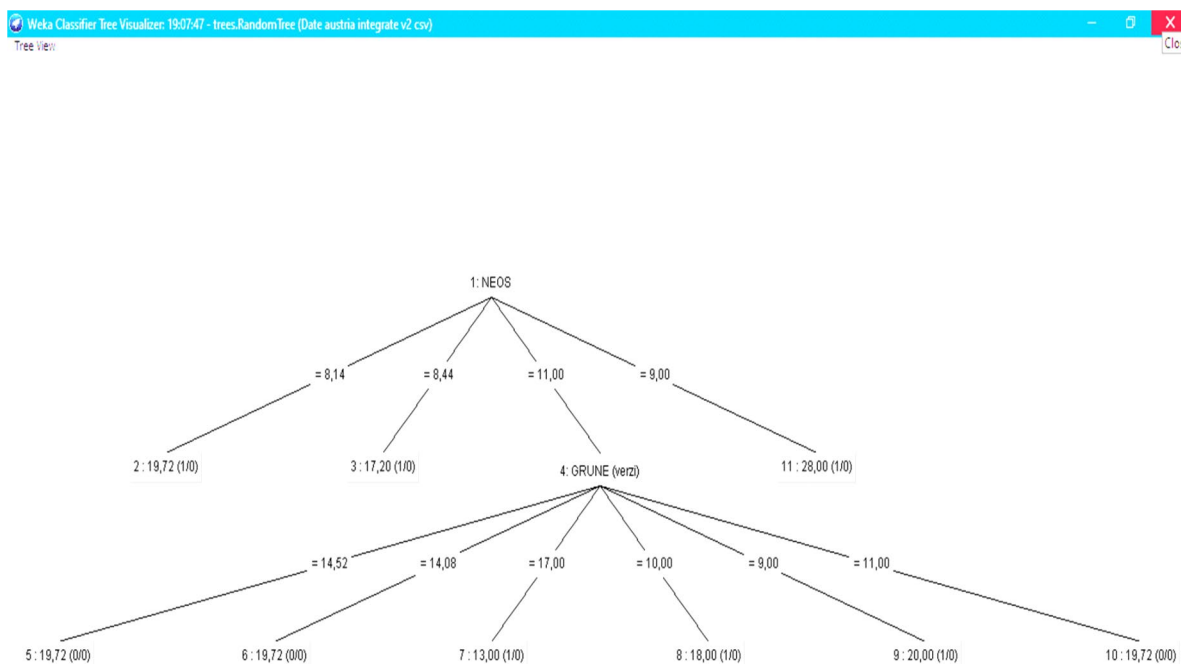

Figure 2. Analysis of collected data
Source Realized by author

The simulation highlights the contribution of the NEOS and GRÜNE (Greens) parties in Austria which, although they have generally been more open to the extension of the Schengen area to countries that meet the necessary criteria, including Romania, are channeling a vote of no-confidence for our country. In this context, the involvement of these parties in Austria's opposition to Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area could have been interpreted as less pronounced or even as being in favor of Romania's accession, but from the simulation, we can identify that the guidelines of its policies, which have taken up the ideology of the moment of the population recently emerged from the pandemic, were able to convince at the level of unitary representation the governmental vision of Austria.

NEOS (Liberal Party) and GRÜNE (Green Party) in Austria have traditionally advocated an approach based on compliance with technical criteria and objective assessment of each candidate state's Schengen membership. These parties have promoted transparency, European cooperation and a solidarity-based approach within the EU, which is also reflected in the prediction tree, a link determined by common ideology. Even if these parties are promoters of compliance with objective criteria and hierarchies, which might make them less likely to

sustain strong opposition to Romania's inclusion in Schengen compared to other more conservative or Eurosceptic parties in Austria, they manage to turn the unilateral decision of much stronger political parties into the unilateral decision of the population's wishes by embodying all the emulation of Austrians in criteria and accession conditions not met by Romania (Dragomir, 2017).

On the analyzed values, applying the cost curve, the graph shows a turning point in the Austrian policy at the level of 2021 (Figure 3), a reformulation of the concept that could mask the psychological profile of the Austrian population after all the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us not neglect the fact that Austrians' feelings towards Romanians are mixed and influenced by a combination of historical, economic, cultural and political factors.
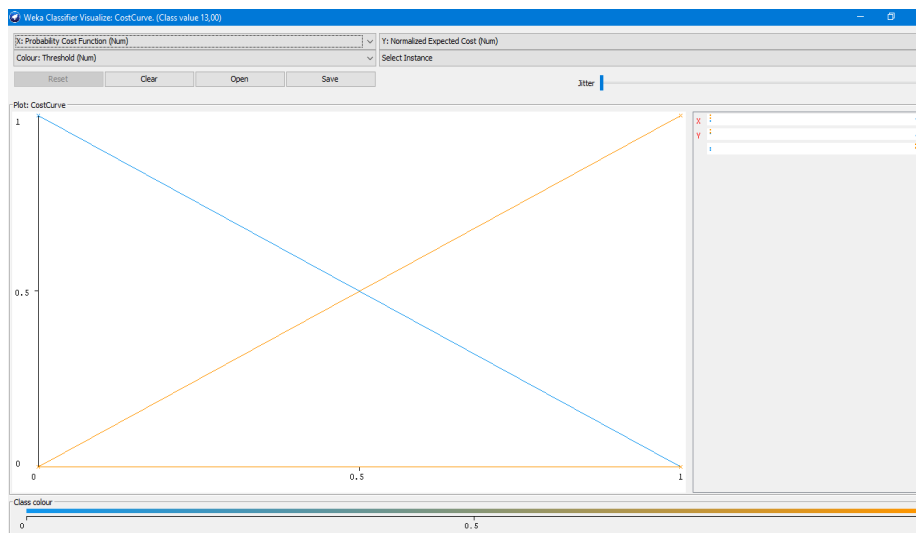
Figure 3. Austrian policy at the level of 2021
Source Realized by authors

Positive and negative perceptions co-exist, and often depend on information sources, political rhetoric and individuals' personal experiences. After Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, many Romanians emigrated to Austria for work and study, and the integration of Romanians into Austrian society can be seen both positively, due to their contribution to the economy, and negatively, due to perceptions of labor market competition or social integration. Negative accounts of criminality or social problems associated with some groups of Romanian migrants may contribute to negative stereotypes, while positive accounts of Romanians' achievements in various fields may contribute to a more favorable image.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

With this data to analyze, we went back to the data collected and the original sources from which the information was extracted in order to identify those factors that determined the attitude of the Austrian government.

We thus show that the turning point (2021) is the year in which Austria recorded the highest unemployment rate (6.18%) in the whole period analyzed. At the same time, with regard to the importance of GRUNE and NEOS, it has been emphasized that from 2021 onwards, in the opinion of the population recorded by the Eurobarometer, environmental issues and the "green future" have lost points to more pressing issues such as immigration. This data goes some way to justifying the importance of the two parties in the Austrian government's attitude, given that their fundamental themes have been displaced from the concerns of the general population.

Economic factor: The economic factor refers to the conditions and influences that affect the financial well-being of individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole. This factor plays a significant role in shaping economic policies, business decisions and government actions. The unemployment rate is a factor that strongly influences government decisions because low unemployment rates are generally associated with a healthy economy. In the context of government decisions, the economic factor often plays a central role in shaping policies related to fiscal management, taxation and social assistance (Michie, 2021). Austria, like many other developed countries, faces labor shortages in certain sectors such as construction, health, elderly care, IT and agriculture. Immigrants can help fill these gaps, helping to maintain and increase economic productivity. The Austrian economy benefits from immigration of skilled workers and specialists in high-demand fields. They can bring needed knowledge and skills, boosting innovation and economic competitiveness. Young working immigrants contribute to the pension system and help balance the ratio between contributors and beneficiaries, essential in a

society with an ageing population. Immigrants' contributions to social security and health care systems are important to maintain the sustainability of these systems in the context of growing financial pressures (Socoliuc et al., 2020). Many immigrants become entrepreneurs, opening businesses that create jobs and help diversify the economy. This can stimulate local economic development and innovation. Migrants can attract foreign investment and facilitate international trade because of their links with their countries of origin.

Demographic factor refers to the statistical characteristics of a population. These characteristics are often used to analyze and classify people in a particular group. It provides insights into the composition, distribution and trends within a population. Immigration policies can also address concerns about social cohesion and community integration. Immigration can influence demographic trends by contributing to population growth. Governments can consider immigration as a strategy to address demographic challenges, such as an ageing population or low birth rates (Leeson, 2011). Austria, like many other European countries, has an ageing population with a significant proportion of senior citizens and a low birth rate. This puts pressure on the pension and health care systems and creates a need for a young workforce to contribute to the national economy. Immigrants can help offset this demographic imbalance by providing young workers and helping to support social systems. Migrants play an important role in the Austrian labor market. They often fill jobs in sectors facing labor shortages, such as construction, agriculture, elderly care and other essential services. This helps maintain and grow the country's economy. Immigration brings cultural diversity, which can benefit society by stimulating innovation, creativity and adaptability. However, managing diversity can be challenging and can generate social tensions if not properly addressed. Public opinion and political pressures significantly influence immigration policies. In times of economic uncertainty or crisis, there may be a tendency to restrict immigration, while in times of economic growth and labor shortages, immigration may be encouraged. In the short term, immigration may generate costs related to the social and economic integration of newcomers, such as costs for education, training and social services. In the long run, well-managed immigration can bring substantial economic benefits, including growth, innovation and demographic stability.

The level of crime or crime rate is often considered an important factor when analyzing government decisions. Crime can have wide-ranging implications for society, public safety, and the general welfare of a community, and underlies many decisions that affect the entire governed community (Noymer & Hatori, 2016).

Austria's security factor significantly influences policies and attitudes towards the reception of immigrants. Security concerns can shape both government decisions and public perceptions of immigration. Terrorist events in Europe have heightened security fears. The Austrian government may be more cautious on immigration to prevent the infiltration of potential terrorists. These concerns may lead to stricter vetting measures and more restrictive immigration policies. Fear of radicalization of certain immigrant groups may influence immigration policy. Austria can implement integration and monitoring programs to prevent radicalization and promote social cohesion. As an EU member state, Austria has a significant interest in securing the Union's external borders. Part of the opposition to the expansion of the Schengen area to include countries such as Romania is based on concerns about the ability of these countries to ensure effective external border control. Concerns about illegal migration and human trafficking influence immigration policies. Austria can take stringent measures to control and prevent illegal migration, including reinforced border controls and cooperation with other EU countries. Austria's capacity to manage and integrate large numbers of immigrants is an important factor. Limited resources for screening, integration and security can influence immigration policy.

The security and law enforcement infrastructure must be adequate to cope with immigration requirements. This includes surveillance technology, security personnel and inter-agency cooperation. Political parties can use security themes to strengthen their electoral position. Discourses that emphasize the risks associated with immigration can lead to the adoption of stricter policies, as we observe from the presented simulation, discourses with which the NEOS and GRUNE parties have succeeded.

The social factor encompasses a wide range of influences that shape the structure of society and can influence government decisions. It reflects people's values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Various social factors come into play when considering government decisions. The collective opinions and attitudes of the public on specific issues can significantly influence government decisions. Governments may respond to public sentiment through policy changes, reforms or public awareness efforts (Ferris et al., 2016).

Austria focuses on integrating immigrants into its society by promoting German language learning and Austrian cultural values. The success or failure of these efforts can influence public attitudes and government policies. There are various integration programs for immigrants to facilitate access to education, vocational training and employment. The effectiveness of these programs influences how immigrants are perceived and their level of acceptance. Austria, as part of the European Union, is influenced by the principles of diversity and multiculturalism. The level of acceptance of cultural and ethnic diversity may vary across regions and communities in Austria. The integration of immigrant children into the education system is crucial for their long-term success. Policies supporting equal access to education for all children regardless of origin can influence attitudes towards immigration. Access to health and social services for immigrants is an important factor. Ensuring that immigrants benefit from adequate services can reduce social tensions and contribute to successful integration. Fears of loss of

cultural identity, competition in the labor market and pressures on social systems can fuel negative attitudes towards immigrants.

Political factors play a significant role in shaping government decisions, as they are deeply linked to the functioning of political institutions, power dynamics and the overall political environment. The ideological orientation of the ruling party or government officials can shape decisions on various issues, including economic policies, social programs, and international relations. Policy decisions are influenced by the dynamics of party politics, including party platforms, internal party divisions and alliances with other political groups. Government decisions are often influenced by public opinion as leaders seek to maintain popularity and public support. Popularity can affect the political capital available for decision-making. Election timing and electoral cycles can influence government decisions. Austria's opposition to Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area can influence national security in several ways:

1. **Border control**: Schengen abolishes internal border controls between Member States. Austria's opposition could mean delays or difficulties in implementing this principle, which could affect Romania's ability to manage and monitor the flow of people effectively at its borders.

2. **Security cooperation**: Schengen integration implies close cooperation on security and justice between Member States. Austria's opposition could influence this cooperation process, including the exchange of information and coordination of actions to combat cross-border crime and terrorism.

3. **The impact on the EU's eastern border**: Romania has a long and important border in the east of the European Union. Integration into Schengen could strengthen the security of this border, ensuring more effective border control and preventing illegal or unauthorized entries into the Schengen area. Austria's opposition could delay or jeopardize the implementation of the necessary measures to secure this border.

4. **International prestige and influence**: The views and positions of Schengen Member States, including Austria, can influence Romania's perception and positioning within the EU and internationally. Persistent opposition from Austria could affect Romania's prestige and its ability to actively contribute to common security policies.

Politicians may prioritize short-term policies to gain voter support during election periods (Holtz-Bacha, 2012; Madson & Hillygus, 2020).

IV.CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Austria's opposition or support for Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area may have significant impacts on Romanians' daily lives by influencing mobility, job opportunities and security, thus contributing to the improvement of the overall quality of life in the country. Finally, Austria's opposition to Romania's inclusion in the Schengen area may have repercussions on Romania's national security by influencing border control, cross-border security cooperation and the impact on the security of the EU's eastern border. It is important that decisions and negotiations in this regard take all these aspects into account in order to ensure Romania's effective and secure integration into the Schengen area. Austrian feelings towards Romanians are mixed and influenced by a combination of historical, economic, cultural and political factors. Positive and negative perceptions co-exist, and often depend on information sources, political rhetoric and individuals' personal experiences.

In conclusion, Austria's demographic factor significantly influences the reception of immigrants, through the need to compensate for an ageing population, to support the labor market and to manage cultural diversity, we note that immigration policies are also shaped by public perceptions and the economic and social context of the period.

Although Austria's economic factor plays a crucial role in shaping immigrant reception policies and attitudes towards immigration, and the growing economy and the need for young and skilled labor force favor a greater openness to immigration, while the difficult economic context may generate reluctance and more restrictive policies it can be concluded that an emotional disequilibrium of the Austrian population post-COVID has repercussions on the degree of acceptance or not of immigration. The security factor significantly influences the reception of immigrants in Austria. Concerns about terrorism, illegal migration, organized crime, and administrative and security capacity determine immigration policies and public attitudes. These policies and perceptions are shaped by international events, European collaboration and domestic political rhetoric.

Austria's social factors influence the reception of immigrants through their impact on social cohesion, access to services, public perceptions and inter-community relations. Government policies and integration initiatives play a crucial role in shaping these factors and promoting an inclusive and harmonious society.

The cooperation of the two parties, visible cooperation within governmental coalitions or in support of legislative initiatives, has supported more in the opposition the pro-European orientation in support of Romania's integration into the Schengen area.

Both Neos and Grunen support the fight against racism, promote human rights as well as the prevention of corruption and the psycho-social sustainability of Austrians, boosting the Austrian option of Schengen enlargement.

In the authors' opinion, in the complex process of our country's accession to the Schengen area there must be sustained policies of close cooperation with FRONTEX to demonstrate border management capacity and implementation of anti-corruption measures to prevent any form of illegal trafficking.

A political and diplomatic dialog with Austria, along with many dissemination and information campaigns highlighting the economic benefits for Austria are tools that our government can use to implement measures that can help Roman in achieve its goal of joining the Schengen area.

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