

Narrating Fortress Europe: Politicians' Border Narratives in European Border Regions

Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, Péter Balogh, Artur Boháč, Hynek Böhm, Pierrick Bruyas, Oriana Miraka, Łukasz Moll, Sara Svensson & Birte Wassenberg

To cite this article: Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, Péter Balogh, Artur Boháč, Hynek Böhm, Pierrick Bruyas, Oriana Miraka, Łukasz Moll, Sara Svensson & Birte Wassenberg (29 Jun 2026): Narrating Fortress Europe: Politicians' Border Narratives in European Border Regions, Journal of Borderlands Studies, DOI: [10.1080/08865655.2026.2681033](https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2026.2681033)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2026.2681033>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 29 Jun 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 174



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Narrating Fortress Europe: Politicians' Border Narratives in European Border Regions

Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt ^a, Péter Balogh ^{b,c}, Artur Boháč ^d, Hynek Böhm ^{d,e}, Pierrick Bruyas ^{f,*}, Oriana Miraka ^g, Łukasz Moll ^h, Sara Svensson ^g and Birte Wassenberg^f

^aBrunel University of London, Uxbridge, UK; ^bInstitute for Regional Studies, ELTE Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Pécs, Hungary; ^cDepartment of Social and Economic Geography, Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary; ^dDepartment of Geography, Technical University Liberec, Liberec, Czech Republic; ^eInstitute of Political and Administrative Sciences, University of Opole, Opole, Poland; ^fUniversité de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France; ^gHalmstad University, Halmstad, Sweden; ^hUniversity of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland

ABSTRACT

The process of European integration is closely linked with how borders are governed. This makes border narratives a revealing lens through which to study stances on European integration and Euroscepticism, including in party politics. This article analyzes how parties in border regions narrated borders during the 2024 European elections, drawing on interviews with candidates and campaigners from four internal EU border regions. Across party families and levels of Euroscepticism, three narratives recur: open internal borders as desirable and beneficial, internal border closures as disruptive of everyday cross-border life, and open internal borders as contingent on stronger control at the EU's external borders. The findings show that internal openness and external control are frequently narrated as mutually dependent. They also suggest that contestation over European integration is often articulated through selective border narratives, in which support for Schengen and free movement can coexist with exclusionary demands for stronger external border control.

KEYWORDS

Border; narrative; Euroscepticism; parties; Schengen; European integration

1. Introduction

European integration has fundamentally transformed borders in Europe. Nowhere is this more evident than at the EU's internal Schengen borders, where physical controls largely disappeared in an area comprising 29 countries, and then reappeared during the Covid-19 pandemic and following concerns over criminal activity or migration (Koinova et al. 2023). The EU's external borders have come under particular scrutiny in response to migration from third countries (Kriesi et al. 2021). At times of heightened salience,

CONTACT Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt  Katja.sarmiento-mirwaldt@brunel.ac.uk

*Since the completion of this research, Pierrick Bruyas has moved to the University of Upper-Alsace and can be contacted at pierrick.bruyas@uha.fr

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

borders function as political symbols and reference points in public debates (Casaglia et al. 2020; Scott 2012). However, as Mazzoleni (2023, 1–2) points out, research on party competition has paid little attention to “territorial dimensions, including borders”. Surprisingly little is known about how political parties frame borders in those places where they are experienced most directly: border regions.

In border regions, political parties matter above all because they connect local experiences of mobility and cross-border contact to wider political narratives about the EU, openness and border control. This makes these regions very useful settings in which to examine how political actors narrate the relationship between openness and control. The present analysis covers narratives in four internal EU border regions: the Danish-Swedish, Franco-German, Slovak-Hungarian and Polish-German-Czech border regions. In border regions such as these, the everyday realities of cross-border mobility make the relationship between border control and European integration especially visible.

Euroscepticism and restrictive border politics have sometimes been associated with parties on the radical right (Brack 2020; Klatt 2020; Roch 2024). Other scholars have shown that party positions on the EU and borders are more differentiated (Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018; van Kessel 2025). Building on this literature, the present article asks how party actors in border regions narrated borders during the 2024 European election campaign, and how these narratives connected internal and external EU borders. It further asks what these narratives reveal about the relationship between party politics, European integration and border control. Interviews with 37 politicians from border regions show that interviewees across party families often defended open internal EU borders, while making them contingent on external border controls.

This article’s contribution is twofold: first, it speaks to border studies by showing how party actors in cross-border settings narratively link internal openness with external control. Second, it contributes to research on Euroscepticism and party politics by showing that selective border narratives are one important way in which European integration is contested. In this way, the article shows that border narratives can be used to connect border studies and party politics, as they reveal how politicians attach meaning to the EU, to belonging and to security in election campaigns.

The article proceeds as follows: the next section combines insights from research on the symbolic and narrative construction of borders with research on Euroscepticism in party politics. The third section presents the methods of data collection and analysis, a narrative analysis of 37 interviews with politicians from four border regions. In the analysis, we identify three dominant narratives about borders: a narrative of open internal borders being beneficial, a narrative of border closures and controls disrupting these benefits, and a narrative of open internal borders depending on fortified external EU borders. These narratives cut across party lines. Taken together, they show that border regions are political spaces in which locally grounded experiences and practices shape narratives of openness and control.

2. Narrating Borders in Party Politics

Borders are symbolically and practically entwined with the European integration process. This process transformed many internal borders into zones of exchange and mobility,

while simultaneously mandating – at least nominally – strong enforcement of the external borders (Kriesi et al. 2021). This tension between freedoms on the inside and buttressing against the outside has been captured in the metaphor “Fortress Europe” (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2021).

Border scholars have long pointed out that borders are not only markers on the ground; they are also socially and politically constructed through narratives that endow them with meaning (Eder 2006; Newman 2006; Paasi 1999). Border regions are sites where ordinary people and political actors engage in what has been called bordering practice (Opłowska 2025), i.e. discursive processes and shared understandings that define where lines of inclusion and exclusion should be drawn. Border regions are therefore analytically useful settings to examine how the EU is made meaningful through the narrative construction of who belongs, and who does not (Bürkner 2020; Eder 2006; Newman 2006).

Borders have been instrumentalized by political actors for political ends, for example when Eurosceptic parties mobilized nativist sentiment around them (Lamour and Varga 2020). Politicians’ narratives about the relative merits of a particular border regime are related to a more general worldview that concerns the EU, control and openness towards outsiders such as immigrants (Kriesi et al. 2008). Their narratives of borders can, therefore, illuminate wider understandings of sovereignty, belonging and security (Bürkner 2020; Lauener 2023; Mazzoleni 2023).

A strand of the literature on politicians’ narratives about borders focuses on Euroscepticism (Brack 2020; Bürkner 2020; Krasteva 2020). A Eurosceptic party is defined in this article as one whose overall stance on European integration is more opposed than supportive. Existing research has long located the strongest Euroscepticism on the radical left and the radical right of the political spectrum (Taggart 1998). Radical left parties are here defined as parties to the left of social democracy, typically marked by anti-capitalist positions. Radical left Euroscepticism is commonly linked to criticism of the EU’s perceived neoliberal orientation (De Vries and Edwards 2009; Kriesi 2020; Lauener 2023). Radical right parties are defined as those parties to the right of conservative parties, which emphasize nativism as an ideology “that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group” (Mudde 2007, 19). On the right, Euroscepticism is often rooted in nationalism and an emphasis on state sovereignty and border control (De Vries and Edwards 2009; Ivaldi 2018; Mazzoleni 2023). Radical right parties, in particular, have been shown to view borders through a security lens, for example in relation to migration (Brack 2020; Roch 2024) and crime (Klatt 2020).

However, some scholars have cautioned against overstating this ideological divide. Thus, van Kessel (2025) argues that radical right parties should not automatically be equated with Eurosceptic ones. Some radical right parties favor aspects of European integration that they see as benefiting their state, such as economic integration or cooperation to limit immigration from third countries (Lorimer 2024). Furthermore, radical right parties are not homogeneous, and their Eurosceptic message is often malleable (Cavallaro, Flacher, and Zanetti 2018; Heinisch, McDonnell, and Werner 2021). Prior research also suggests that party actors may adapt narratives to regional contexts. For example, Biancalana et al. (2025) show that radical right parties tailor their narratives to particular regional settings. And while centrist parties have long been held to be more pro-European (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), scholars have identified contagion effects on mainstream parties in terms of Eurosceptic messages from challenger parties

(Bale et al. 2010; Meijers 2017). For example, center-right parties hardened their position on migration in response to competition from radical right parties (Downes, Loveless, and Lam 2021). Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel (2018) identify frame diffusion and co-option of Eurosceptic positions by mainstream parties as important effects on party systems. These do not generate full ideological convergence, but they help explain why mainstream parties may copy specific narratives from Eurosceptic parties, especially in the face of crises such as Covid or the migration crisis.

Narratives are defined here as accounts through which actors make sense of political realities, assigning meaning, causality, and moral judgment (Roe 1994) to borders. Elite narratives, such as those put forward by politicians and policy-makers, matter because they shape how political conflicts are framed and which solutions are seen as legitimate (Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011; Jones and McBeth 2010; Stone 1988). For example, the distinction between internal and external EU borders is not only an institutional and legal reality. It is also a narrative resource that political actors mobilize strategically to make claims about the problems associated with the external border regime and about how this regime ought to be reformed. Narratives diffuse through party rhetoric, media reporting, and electoral strategies (Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011). Although certain narratives can become dominant, they are not fixed; they can be contested and reinterpreted (Boswell, Geddes, and Scholten 2011). Ultimately, as Eder (2006) emphasizes, successful narratives must possess a degree of plausibility in order to resonate with an audience.

The next section outlines the case selection as well as the methods of data collection and analysis used to investigate politicians' accounts of internal and external EU borders.

3. Data and Analysis

The present article is based on an analysis of qualitative interview data gathered in border regions. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were carried out with 37 candidates, party officials and campaigners during the 2024 European elections. The election campaign and its immediate aftermath were selected as a moment of high political salience: although European elections tend to see much lower turnout rates than national elections (Clark 2014), the campaign period is one of the few moments when European issues are given some prominence and when party actors actively communicate their positions on European integration to voters.¹ This makes this period particularly well suited for analyzing how politicians narrate borders.

Interviewees were recruited from the Danish-Swedish, Franco-German, Polish-German-Czech and Slovak-Hungarian border regions. These regions are all internal EU and Schengen border regions, but their individual histories and local circumstances vary.

The Danish-Swedish border region is defined as the transnational metropolitan Øresund region (Öresund in Swedish). Denmark and Sweden are part of a Nordic and Scandinavian context, characterized by long-term collaboration, mutual understanding and a shared historical heritage. However, disputes about divergent policies on drugs and nuclear power, and later migration and crime, caused rifts in the relationship. Since 2015 both countries have repeatedly introduced border controls, citing concerns

about refugees, crime or Covid (Svensson 2023). By 2024, these controls had to some extent become normalized.

The French-German border region is defined here as Alsace, Moselle, and the border-adjacent districts of the German states of Saarland and Baden-Württemberg. Following a conflictual history that culminated in the Second World War, a post-war watershed in bilateral relations not only initiated a period of Franco-German reconciliation; it also began the wider European integration project (Wassenberg 2024). The border region has since become the site of dense local and regional cooperation, an economic powerhouse and a symbol of Franco-German friendship and European integration.

The Polish-German-Czech border region is defined here as the German state of Saxony as well as southern Brandenburg, the Polish lubuskie region and the southwestern parts of the dolnośląskie region, alongside eastern Czechia. This trinational border region looks back on a violent history of aggression, boundary changes and forced population movements that still forms part of living memory. Dense cross-border cooperation networks developed at the local level since the 1990s (Böhm et al. 2023), but border closures and controls in response to Covid, as well as concerns over irregular migration and over environmental problems in the region, caused major disruptions and disagreements.

For the border region between Slovakia and Hungary the focus here is on the border region's western parts because Slovakia's sizeable ethnic Hungarian minority is more concentrated in the southwestern areas (Balogh and Pete 2018). Issues related to the Hungarian minority have been the key factor in Slovak-Hungarian relations, which have improved since the late 1990s, although tensions have resurfaced periodically. Since both countries joined the EU in 2004 and the Schengen Area in 2007, cross-border mobility has intensified, with many bridges having been (re)built along the rivers Danube and Ipel'.

The interviewee recruitment strategy was based on party family and geography. First, the net was cast wide in the choice of parties contacted. A broad spectrum of radical right, radical left and more centrist mainstream parties was contacted. This was done to investigate border narratives not only in parties normally presented as Eurosceptic but also in those mainstream parties usually defined as more pro-European (Rovny et al. 2025). The aim was not to produce a representative sample of all major parties in each national party system, but rather to capture a broad range of border narratives articulated by party actors from different party families. Thus, the study prioritized breadth across the selected border regions over completeness within each individual case. Second, candidates and party officials were approached who have a connection to border regions. This proved challenging because Poland is the only country in the sample that used regional constituencies in the 2024 European elections. Party lists were examined to identify those with links to one of the border regions under consideration, such as candidates from Alsace in France or Saxony in Germany, from southwestern Slovakia, or from the Polish lubuskie and dolnośląskie regions.

To classify parties, this article draws on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) that quantifies party ideologies and positions on a range of issues. Table 1 shows, for each country, with representatives of which parties interviews were carried out, as well as the party family (according to CHES) and the CHES score on two measures: their general position on European integration (from 1 = strongly opposed to 7 = strongly in

Table 1. Overview of parties covered.

Country	Party	Party name in English	CHES party family	CHES EU position score	CHES overall ideology score
Denmark	Radikale Venstre (RV)	Social Liberal Party	liberal	7	4.91
	Dansk Folkeparti (DPP)	Danish People's Party	radical right	1.91	8
	Det Konservative Folkeparti (DKF)	Conservatives	conservatives	5.55	7
Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna (SD)	Sweden Democrats	radical right	2.68	8.53
	Liberalerna (L)	Liberals	liberal	6.84	6.74
	Vänsterpartiet (V)	Left Party	radical left	3.32	1.58
	Moderaterna (M)	Moderate Party	conservatives	5.74	7.58
France	Les Républicains (LR)	The Republicans	conservatives	5.27	7.73
	Renaissance (RE)	Renaissance	liberal	6.27	6.27
	Parti radical de gauche (PRG)	Radical Party of the Left	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Germany	Reconquête (REC)	Reconquest	radical right	1.64	9.73
	La France insoumise (FI)	Unbowed France	radical left	3	0.82
	Die Grünen	The Greens	green	6.79	3.06
	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)	Social Democratic Party of Germany	socialist	6.37	3.47
	Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)	Alternative for Germany	radical right	1.89	9.26
	Die Linke	The Left	radical left	3.72	1.42
Czechia	Akce nespokojených občanů (ANO2011)	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	no family	3.07	4.22
	Občanská demokratická strana (ODS)	Civic Democratic Party	conservatives	4	7.13
	Starostové a nezávislí (STAN)	Mayors and Independents	liberal	6.64	5.8
Poland	Bezpartyjni Samorządowcy	Non-partisan local administrators	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)	Law and Justice	radical right	3.1	7.64
	Nowa Lewica	New Left	socialist	6.9	2.41
	Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość	Confederation Liberty and Independence	radical right	1.52	9.39
	Platforma Obywatelska (PO)	Civic Platform	christian-democratic	6.63	4.93
Hungary	Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (MHM)	Our Homeland Movement	radical right	2.11	9.29
	Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség	Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance	radical right	2.89	8.61
	Momentum Mozgalom	Momentum Movement	liberal	6.78	4.17
Slovakia	Independent		n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
	Aliancia – Szövetség	Hungarian Alliance	regionalist	3.79	7.07
	Sloboda a solidarita (SaS)	Freedom and Solidarity	liberal	5.33	6.78
	Progresívne Slovensko (PS)	Progressive Slovakia	liberal	6.95	4.56

Source: 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Rovny et al. 2025).

favor) and their overall ideology on a scale from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Operationally, parties below the neutral midpoint of 4 are treated here as Eurosceptic, in line with the conceptual definition of a Eurosceptic party as one whose overall stance on European integration is more opposed than supportive. The parties listed in Table 1 also vary substantially in their overall position on the EU, with parties such as the Danish People's Party or the Polish Confederation Liberty and Independence being classed as highly Eurosceptic, whereas others, such as the Czech Mayors and Independents party or the liberal Progressive Slovakia party are categorized as highly pro-European.

From some parties listed in [Table 1](#), more than one candidate or party official was interviewed. The table also shows that candidates and party officials were recruited from across the political spectrum, ranging from radical left parties such as the Swedish Left Party and the French Unbowed France Party, to the radical right, including the German Alternative for Germany and the Hungarian Our Homeland Movement and Fidesz parties. In what follows, the term “mainstream” is used to capture a broad spectrum of parties that are not on the radical right or radical left, including liberal, conservative, christian-democratic, socialist and green parties. While some important parties are not represented in this final sample, interviews do cover parties ranging from the far left to the far right, as per CHES classifications.

As the main focus was on the 2024 European elections, most interviewees (27) were candidates in those elections.² Other interviewed party officials included national and regional MPs, representatives of border municipalities and assistants to candidates, all of whom campaigned in the 2024 European elections. Most important for the purposes of this study is that they were all from one of the case study border regions.

Interviews were carried out in person and online. They all followed a common semi-structured interview guide that covered four broad areas: (1) the main issues in the specific border region in question, (2) borders in Europe in general, (3) the 2024 European election campaign, and (4) perceptions of European integration and the European Union. The guide was designed to elicit whether and how interviewees connected borders and the EU in the campaign context. It ensured comparability between cases, but the interviews themselves were conversational in tone, offering interviewees the opportunity to raise or elaborate themes they considered important. With the interviewees’ informed consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts were pseudo-anonymized.³

Narrative analysis was employed due to the focus on how politicians construct and narrate borders. Narrative analyses of interview data seek to explore how people make sense of their experiences through accounts that attribute meaning and moral assessment to social and political phenomena. Rather than analyzing the formal structure of narratives, the present study follows Plummer (1995) in focusing on the function that particular narratives perform, or what he calls “the social role of stories: the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process.” (Plummer 1995, 19). The analysis therefore treats interview accounts as narratives through which political actors interpret borders, assign them meaning, and justify particular positions on openness and control within the context of European integration.

For the analysis, the material was organized using the broad areas of the interview guide, while also noting themes that emerged spontaneously across interviews, such as references to the external border. Thus, the analytical focus is on the narrators’ (i.e. the interviewees’) accounts of their experiences in specific local contexts (the border regions). To facilitate cross-case comparison, the analysis identifies recurring narratives to capture both locally situated constructions of borders and broader patterns that emerge across border regions. This analytical approach allows researchers to preserve sensitivity to local context while enabling systematic comparison.

4. Three Narratives about Borders

In the data gathered from interviews with politicians about the general role of borders and the specific role of “their” border region, three overarching narratives stand out: open borders as positive and beneficial for border regions; border closures and border checks as a threat to these border regions; and open internal borders as being contingent on effective enforcement of the border regime at the external borders. Importantly, interviewees from the case study regions, which were all internal EU border regions, were not asked directly about the EU’s external borders. References to external border control emerged from the interviews themselves when respondents discussed borders in the EU more generally.

4.1. Narrative of Open Borders Being “A Wonderful Thing”

A very prominent narrative is one of support for open borders in the border regions in which interviews were carried out. While the term “open borders” was deliberately not defined in interviews, interviewees framed their narratives around two interlinked understandings of the term: passport-free travel within the Schengen Area and free movement within the single market. Across the party spectrum, very few interviewees questioned these open borders, which were frequently associated with European integration. A narrative about the beneficial effects of open borders was detected in all the case study regions except for the Danish-Swedish one.

Open intra-Schengen borders were described by an independent Slovak-Hungarian border-town representative as “a wonderful thing”. He went on to say: “it is very difficult to verbally express how great Schengen and open borders are – they are super-great!” (HU_5_m). As noted above, the Slovak-Hungarian border cuts across ethnic Hungarian communities. In this context, Hungarian speakers’ narratives about the benefits of open borders were often linked to the preservation of links across the border: thus, a candidate from the radical right Fidesz party (HU_6_f) depicted open borders as “generally important [...] from a national-policy angle, to unite the nation – that is, so that the movement of Hungarians beyond the borders is not made difficult.” On the Slovak side, a Hungarian Alliance candidate echoed this narrative by saying that open borders are “a very positive thing, because we were previously unable to visit the kin state [Hungary], or later with a passport only” (HU_2_m). In other words, both these interviewees defined community as something that transcends the border between the two states and attached a positive moral value to open borders that permit contact across the border among Hungarian “kin”.

Free movement within the single market, including free movement of labor, is another aspect of the same narrative of the benefits of open borders. For example, none of the candidates in the Franco-German border region raised the issue of intra-EU migration of their own accord. When asked about EU citizens crossing a French border – originating in South or Central Europe especially – these interviewees did not see any problems with this, including a candidate from the radical right Eurosceptic Reconquest party. The narrative that open borders as part of the single market bring material benefits was also detected elsewhere. Thus, the three liberal Slovak interviewees presented open borders as a cornerstone of European integration, a sentiment echoed by a German socialist

politician, who described open borders as “an absolutely fundamental part of European integration” (DE_5_m). These interviewees described open borders within the single market as “one of the biggest advantages of the EU” (SK_3_f) that brings tangible benefits such as economic growth, increased trade, investment, and opportunities not only in the border region but across the EU. In this narrative, open borders are presented not only as linked to economic benefits but as the causes of these benefits.

References to Schengen, the single market and European integration show that the open internal borders regime is clearly linked to the EU. One Czech interviewee from the conservative Civic Democratic Party explicitly linked open borders to European integration as a process of removing national barriers to economic integration, or “negative integration” (cf. Scharpf 1998):

I am strongly in favor of an open borders regime if we are herewith adding value to the possibilities of national states. I very much liked the phase of negative European integration ... the phase when integration helped to remove real existing cooperation obstacles, more or less until the Maastricht Treaty. (CZ_2_m)

The absence of any critical narratives about EU citizens crossing borders suggests that these citizens were narrated as members of a wider community of Europeans rather than as outsiders. Going further, many interviewees developed the narrative of open borders being desirable into one where open borders have a positive effect on neighborhood and attitudes in the border region in question. For example, a Czech candidate from the liberal STAN party, who described open borders as “one of the EU’s greatest achievements” (CZ_3_m), especially highlighted their role in facilitating cultural exchange. In the Polish-German-Czech border region, the bold claim that borders are virtually invisible and “do not exist in our consciousness” (PL_5_f) was clearly part of a common narrative repertoire: almost all interviewees from this region noted approvingly how normal it had become to cross the border for shopping, sightseeing and tourism, and for Poles and Czechs to work on the German side, though not vice versa. At the same time, among Czech interviewees and one Slovak interviewee this came with a concern about brain drain. Polish radical right and mainstream candidates alike also claimed that these contacts between people on both sides of the Polish-German and Polish-Czech borders had abolished “mental barriers” (PL_5_f, also PL_4_m). Again, the claim in this narrative is that open borders themselves promote exchanges and greater cultural openness, which is judged to be morally desirable.

The narrative that open borders have positive effects was not limited to mainstream candidates and campaigners from generally pro-European parties. Politicians from radical right parties also frequently articulated positive narratives about open internal EU borders. In France, Czechia, Germany, Hungary and Poland, politicians from radical right Eurosceptic parties presented open intra-EU borders in a positive light. For example, an interviewee from Hungary’s radical right Our Homeland Movement party said, “in many territories the border’s opening has been positive; where small Hungarian villages have been dead-end settlements up until accession to the EU and Schengen” (HU_1_m). A German interviewee from the radical right Eurosceptic AfD envisaged an EU of sovereign member states as a future ideal: when pressed on the role borders would play in such an EU, he replied: “The borders will remain open.” (DE_2_m). In this respect, the interviews suggest that support for internal openness formed part of a

broader cross-case narrative repertoire rather than belonging to one party family or one particular border region alone. They also suggest that, across the political spectrum, cross-border mobility of EU citizens for activities such as commuting, labor mobility, kin-state contact, shopping or tourism are accepted across the political spectrum.

The Danish-Swedish border region is the only exception to the overall pattern. Here, representatives of party families with varying stances towards the EU expressed support for some form of border controls. Those from parties of a more pro-European persuasion did so with much regret, whereas Eurosceptic politicians on the radical right wholeheartedly emphasized that national jurisdictions should control how borders are handled. Eurosceptics to the left, while arguing for a borderless world and free movement, expressed support for some controls at the internal borders, as the following irresolute quote shows: “We believe that control is needed to reduce drug-related crime. That’s something we think is very important. But we don’t think there should be any border controls when it comes to ... There should be free movement.” (SE_3_f).

Support in this region for border controls included support for reintroduction of permanent border controls, as expressed by a candidate from the Eurosceptic Danish People’s Party: “[If we leave Schengen] we don’t have to have border control be approved by the EU Commission. If border control was permanent, then we could use technology much better.” (DK_2_m). As noted at the outset, this border region has been beset by disagreements over the two countries’ divergent approaches to migration and by cross-border crime. It was in this context that the border’s openness was presented as a security threat. This sets the Danish-Swedish border apart in this study, as border controls had to some extent become the normal *modus operandi* long before the 2024 European elections. This is the only region in which support for border controls cuts across party families, from mainstream parties to the radical right and, to some extent, the radical left. The Danish-Swedish case shows that principled support for internal openness was often qualified by demands for selective controls aimed at specific flows, especially those associated with crime.

To summarize, except for the Danish-Swedish border region, open borders within the Schengen zone and the EU were narrated overwhelmingly as beneficial and desirable. In most of the cases examined here, support for internal openness, which was attributed to European integration, formed an important part of the narrative repertoire. The main pattern is cross-party coherence, while differences lie more in the reasons interviewees gave for valuing internal openness. However, there is some variation in context-specificity, as is particularly evident in the Slovak-Hungarian and Danish-Swedish border regions. Yet, the widespread narrative of open borders being “a wonderful thing” was disrupted in crises when borders reappeared, prompting sharply divergent responses among politicians, as the next section shows.

4.2. Narratives of Border Closures as “Traumatic”

While the narrative of open internal borders being materially and normatively desirable is dominant in most of the border regions under consideration, narratives in reaction to the sudden reappearance of borders – be it during the Covid-19 pandemic or for other reasons, such as Germany’s October 2023 decision to introduce border checks at its borders with Poland, Czechia and Switzerland – were more varied. Some interviewees

reacted with sympathy or indifference. In the Danish-Swedish border region, memories of Covid had already faded by 2024. In the Slovak-Hungarian border region, some politicians were quite understanding of Covid-related border closures. For example, a Slovak-Hungarian candidate said: “this was an entirely new situation for which no-one was prepared” (HU_2_m). In the Polish-German-Czech border region, some interviewees had barely noticed these closures, did not consider them harmful or claimed that other Covid containment measures such as curfews had had worse effects than border closures.

Others were much more critical. For example, a critique of border closures was formulated by a French candidate from the radical left Eurosceptic Unbowed France party: “The reflex during Covid, with certain ministries, was to limit movements. Geographical borders were tested in this crisis situation. However, borders must remain open.” (FR_5_m). Such a narrative contrasts the sudden visibility of borders with their prior invisibility. The reactions show how important open borders were to some politicians’ understanding of daily life in their region: in this narrative, connecting is a function that borders “should” perform, and when they do not, this is presented as harmful. In the Slovak-Hungarian border region, four interviewees – both Hungarian- and Slovak-speaking – were very disparaging about border closures. A border town representative from Fidesz was the only Hungarian interviewee to bring up Covid of his own volition and was highly critical of the closures: “I could not agree with them, and do not believe they have really affected the number of cases or even the spread of the whole thing. Therefore, it is not certain that these [border closures] were necessary.” (HU_4_m). In the Polish-German-Czech border region, a Polish candidate recalled his shock at seeing the police and army at the border during the Covid border closures. Czech interviewees, too, were united in criticizing the Covid measures, which they found “chaotic” and “poorly coordinated” (CZ_1_f, CZ_3_m). The negative effects on families, workers, local firms, and cross-border traffic were outlined by all these interviewees in some detail: as one German interviewee from the far right AfD put it: “Many Poles work on our side but live in Poland. [...] Many Poles are employed in the last remaining glassworks company in Weißwasser, and in the hospital and care facilities. For them it became real hardship.” (DE_3_m).

German politicians in the Polish-German-Czech border region described the border closures as a “catastrophe” (DE_4_m), a “calamity” (DE_3_m) and as “traumatic” (DE_5_m), and they claimed that these closures illustrated the fragility of Schengen and undermined the advantages of the single market. These interviewees understood borders’ ordinary function as connecting: when borders departed from this function and took on a barrier function, at least some border regional politicians from across the political spectrum tended to see this critically.

Unlike the supportive narratives of open internal borders, the critique of border closures was rarely framed in relation to the EU. In general, closures were implicitly narrated as actions by member states that disrupted the everyday routines made possible by Schengen and the single market. As noted at the outset, border narratives can illuminate broader stances on sovereignty and control. A Fidesz candidate tied the Covid measures to the more general question of sovereignty over borders, arguing that Covid had shown that “interestingly enough, when the member states want to close their borders, they are able to do it.” He added that “terror threats and pandemics, or – if

unhalted – illegal migration may lead to internal border controls” (HU_3_m). In this narrative, border closures are a legitimate tool of state control to contain threats. Similar narratives were also detected on both sides of the Danish-Swedish border.

However, other narratives about border closures or control question their efficacy and highlight the downsides of border controls. Thus, in the Polish-German-Czech border region, several Polish interviewees were critical not only of the Covid-related border closures, but also of Germany’s decision to reintroduce border controls, which undermined the “brotherly borders” that were being built through EU-funded cross-border cooperation (PL_1_m). According to a Polish candidate from a radical right party coalition, the reintroduction of controls by Germany was a reminder that borders had not disappeared, as it had been perceived after Poland’s accession to the Schengen Area. A party official from the Christian-democratic Civic Platform considered these controls a serious problem for the inhabitants of the border region and criticized the decision. However, other Polish interviewees contested this narrative by expressing understanding for Germany’s decision, drawing on a similar threat narrative as the Fidesz candidate quoted above, highlighting illegal immigration into Germany as a reason. This shows again that different politicians draw on different narrative repertoires when explaining their positions on border closures.

In sum, the narrative that border closures and controls make life difficult for border region residents appeared in most of the case study regions. While this narrative was not unanimous, it was widespread among interviewees. Here too, the strongest contrast is not between party families but between narratives that framed closures as disruptive of everyday cross-border life and narratives that justified them in the language of sovereignty or security. Critical positions build on the more general narrative of open borders being especially beneficial for border region residents. When this normative expectation of openness is violated, strong emotional and political responses follow. One contrast between cases suggests that reactions to closures were shaped partly by how deeply cross-border routines had become embedded: where established routines were heavily cross-border, criticism was prevalent across party families. In contrast, in the Danish-Swedish border region – where border controls had already become routine – acceptance of these controls was more common, and this acceptance also cut across party families.

4.3. Narrative of Open Internal Borders Requiring Strengthened External Borders

Support for open borders – both in terms of passport-free travel in the Schengen Area and in terms of free movement – frequently came with a stipulation that internal freedoms and open borders depend on securing the external borders. Importantly, this narrative emerged spontaneously from the bottom-up in these internal EU border regions, as the interview guide did not include a separate question about the EU’s external borders. Still, the narrative was raised in every case study region. The narrative that open internal borders depend on secured external ones is often accompanied by the claim that external border controls are insufficient. And just as the narrative of the benefits of open borders was embraced by mainstream politicians and those of the Eurosceptic radical right alike, the narrative in favor of strong external borders was

likewise promulgated not only by radical right Eurosceptics but also by mainstream politicians.

In France, the praised openness of the Franco-German border was linked to a narrative that the external border – located far away from the region – should be controlled strictly. According to a radical right candidate from the region: “Monitoring Europe’s external borders – We need to come together in a decision-making union to strengthen Frontex. The goal is to improve, not to be dogmatic or ideological. Financial resources need to be allocated.” (FR_4_m). This interviewee explicitly identified a lack of coordination at the European level as the root of the problems perceived in the external borders regime. The same narrative of collective failure was also echoed elsewhere: politicians’ narratives in the Danish-Swedish border region were dominated by the causal logic that open internal borders require securing the EU’s external border. As stated by a candidate from the radical right Eurosceptic Sweden Democrats, “If you think that the free movement within the EU is a good thing, then you must realize that it requires strong external border protection.” (SE_1_m). This statement combines a moral judgment (“If you think that the free movement within the EU is a good thing”) with a causal logic (“then you must realize that it requires strong external border protection”). This narrative featured very strongly among radical right Eurosceptic parties, and it was also put forward by more pro-European parties, e.g. the conservative Swedish Moderate Party, whose representative outlined his party’s agreement with the radical right:

On the issue of external border controls, the Sweden Democrats and the Moderate Party largely agree: strong external borders so that we don’t need internal ones. And in that sense, we are more aligned with the Moderate Party’s official position and our stance on this. (SE_4_m)

On the Hungarian side of the Slovak-Hungarian border, a Fidesz candidate likewise linked the importance of open intra-Schengen borders with the protection of the external border. Another radical right interviewee from this region presented open intra-EU borders in a positive light but stipulated that the external EU border regime was the key stumbling block, wishing to stop “especially the illegal migration” (HU_1_m). The same narrative about the need to secure the external border against immigrants was put forward by interviewees from the radical right AfD and Polish Confederation.

This narrative ties border politics directly to the EU. In some interviews, this link was explicit, as in calls to strengthen the EU’s border agency Frontex or to improve coordination at the European level. In others, it was more implicit: dissatisfaction with immigration into the EU was translated into criticism of the external border regime, noting negative repercussions for the Schengen Area. The following quote by a conservative Czech candidate illustrates this point: “people in Czechia are very sensitive about the migration of people with culturally different backgrounds. An effective solution to illegal migration to the EU is a must. Otherwise, the Schengen regime will be lost.” (CZ_2_m). The narrative that strong external borders are needed in order to preserve internal openness closely echoes the “Fortress Europe” metaphor outlined above. This narrative was articulated by radical right Eurosceptic parties and mainstream parties alike. As the above-quoted Swedish politician from the mainstream conservative Moderate Party put it: “We don’t like internal border controls, but if we aren’t going to have

internal border controls, then we must have external borders that are strong enough to support this free movement.” (SE_4_m). This sentiment was also echoed by an interviewee from the mainstream Danish Conservatives. In Czechia, all interviewed candidates argued that maintaining public trust in open borders required effective management of external EU borders and migration challenges, as internal freedoms were presented as depending on external security.

This also demonstrates the relevance of the internal border setting. Interviewees in these regions narrated migration across the EU’s external borders as directly affecting the openness of the internal borders. While other EU citizens crossing internal borders for various purposes were treated as legitimate participants in a shared European space, migrants from outside the EU were more likely to be constructed as outsiders whose entry threatened internal openness.

Implied here is a criticism that the external EU border regime is too lax, especially in halting immigration, which emerged as the main stated reason for stronger external border controls. On the Polish side of the Polish-German-Czech border region, many interviewees made the link between the free flow across open borders in the Schengen Area and a necessary strengthening of the external borders of the EU. For example, one party official from the christian-democratic Civic Platform stated that border controls should be strengthened to catch illegal immigrants. According to her, Germany decided to reintroduce border controls because of Polish failures to control the border with Belarus, which is why her party would not intervene in Germany to convince it to end the border controls. A second Polish interviewee from the same party claimed that the EU should take more responsibility for protecting its external borders rather than relying so much on national governments. This narrative was detected in all case study regions. It also transcends party family, as it was promulgated by radical right politicians and those from mainstream parties alike.

As these interviews show, this narrative frequently constructs immigrants from outside the EU as an out-group, posing a threat from which the EU must be protected. Thus, the external EU border functions not only as a territorial boundary but as a symbolic line between insiders and outsiders, delineating who is deemed to belong to a community of Europeans. This narrative excludes migrants, and especially irregular immigrants, from that community. Member states with an external border such as Poland or the EU collectively were variously identified as the appropriate authority responsible for enforcing that boundary. Yet this exclusionary logic is not uncontested. One German politician from the radical left rejected the narrative that external borders must be secured altogether:

[Borders] are artificial lines on a map, and I also say in discussions, I have said again and again when the migration issue was discussed, that anyone who believes that they can conclusively secure borders is living in a complete illusion. You can try all of this if you want, then you increase the costs, so to speak, both for the refugees and for the societies that try to raise these limits in some way, artificially. And the greater the suffering of the people, the more opportunities they will find to overcome these boundaries, and in this respect, I personally consider boundaries to be a construct, which I hope will no longer exist at some point in the distant future. (DE_4_m)

This last quote challenges not only the policy logic but the legitimacy of borders themselves. The critique of the “suffering of the people” suggests a clash between humanitarian

values and measures to fortify external borders. A similar point was made by a radical left Swedish interviewee who said about more controls at the external borders: “We, together with all humanitarian organizations, believe that it violates human rights.” (SE_3_f). However, these were two lone voices among the interviewees.

In summary, the narrative linking open internal borders to the fortification of the EU’s external borders was widespread across the border regions being studied, from the mainstream left to the radical right. Its broad appeal may lie in the narrative plausibility of the claim that internal freedoms require external controls. At the same time, it was often tied to perceived failures of the EU, whether through references to Frontex, to failures of coordination at the European level, or to the stated vulnerability of Schengen. In this sense, the interviews suggest a notable degree of coherence in how internal and external borders were linked in political narratives during the 2024 campaign.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article investigated how political party actors in border regions narrated borders during the 2024 European election campaign. Treating border regions as analytically useful settings, it has shown that party actors repeatedly linked internal openness to external control. In doing so, the article contributes to border studies and to research on Euroscepticism by clarifying how contestation over European integration is narrated through borders.

There are three main findings. First, across most of the case study regions, open internal EU borders were narrated as both morally desirable and materially beneficial for border regions. Support for open internal borders was articulated by parties across the political spectrum and was linked frequently to Schengen, the single market and the European Union.

Second, reactions to the reactivation of internal borders were more mixed, but many interviewees framed border closures and controls, as during Covid or in response to migration, as disruptive to everyday cross-border life. This narrative was less clearly linked to the EU and focused more on the decisions of individual member states.

Third, and most importantly, support for internal openness was very frequently linked to demands for stronger controls at the EU’s external borders. This narrative emerged across all case-study regions and across most party families, even though interviewees were not directly asked about the EU’s external borders. The interviews therefore reveal a striking coherence in how internal and external borders were linked in political narratives during the campaign.

These findings matter for both border studies and the study of Euroscepticism in party politics. They show that border politics are not organized simply around openness or closure. Instead, internal openness and external control are frequently narrated as mutually dependent, which is clearly reflected in the logic often captured by the metaphor of Fortress Europe (e.g. Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2021). By targeting external border controls primarily at migrants from third countries, these narratives reveal how politicians link belonging to the right to move freely within the EU, while casting outsiders as those who should face control and exclusion at its external borders.

For research on Euroscepticism and party politics, the findings do not support a simple assumption that Eurosceptic or radical right actors are uniformly hostile to

openness. Rather, they show that support for aspects of European integration, especially internal free movement, can coexist with exclusionary narratives about the EU's external border. This supports earlier research that cautions against treating radical right parties as uniformly Eurosceptic (Cavallaro, Flacher, and Zanetti 2018; Heinisch, McDonnell, and Werner 2021; Lorimer 2024). Furthermore, many mainstream parties also promulgate the narrative that strong external borders are a prerequisite of open internal ones, whether this reflects broader party-system influences, such as frame diffusion (Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel 2018), or parallel political adaptation. Selective border narratives are thus one important way in which European integration is contested, with the contrast between internal and external borders functioning not only as an institutional distinction but also as a narrative resource.

The article does not claim that these narratives are unique to border regions, nor that the border regional location causes them. Rather, border regions are particularly revealing settings in which the relationship between internal openness and external control becomes visible in political narratives. In the interviews, this relationship was articulated across cases. The specific regional context mattered in shaping nuances, such as kin-state ties in the Slovak-Hungarian case or the security framing of openness in the Danish-Swedish case. Likewise, the study was not intended to support representative claims about all major parties within each national case, but to capture a broad range of border narratives articulated by party actors in the selected regions.

Future research could usefully compare these narratives with those articulated by party officials elsewhere, such as the national party leadership or headquarters to map the extent of local divergence. It could also analyze narrative patterns in other border regional contexts, including at the EU's external borders. More broadly, the findings suggest that attention to border narratives offers a productive way of bringing border studies and party politics into closer dialogue.

Notes

1. Overall turnout in the 2024 European elections was higher than in the previous 2019 European elections (and higher in five of the eight case study countries) but remains much lower than in the most recent national elections in all the case study countries.
2. One of these did not wish to be identified as a candidate because this, together with this candidate's party affiliation, would have made direct identification too easy.
3. Ethical approval for this study was granted from Brunel University of London and the Swedish Ethics Review Authority prior to contacting any potential interviewees.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Martin Hansen, Martin Klatt and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this article.

Author contributions

CRedit: **Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Péter Balogh**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing; **Artur Boháč**: Investigation, Writing – review & editing;

Hynek Böhm: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology; **Pierrick Bruyas:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing; **Oriana Miraka:** Formal analysis, Investigation; **Łukasz Moll:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing; **Sara Svensson:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing; **Birte Wassenberg:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Project administration.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This project has received funding from the European Union's 9th Framework Programme Horizon Europe, under grant agreement No. 101095186 and from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK Government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee, under grant number 10065228.

Data availability statement

The full interview data supporting this study cannot be made available due to ethical restrictions and the need to protect interviewee confidentiality. Summaries of the country analyses are available via Zenodo: Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, K. (2025) "Country summaries for B-Shapes WP3 interview and focus group analysis [Data set]", Zenodo, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16359768>.

Ethics approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee at Brunel University London (Review Reference 44864-A-Apr/2024-50744-1) and the Swedish Ethics Review Authority (Dnr 2023-07557-01-513266).

ORCID

Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7886-9414>

Péter Balogh  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8220-3220>

Artur Boháč  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6238-7472>

Hynek Böhm  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0548-9645>

Pierrick Bruyas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8951-0522>

Oriana Miraka  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7215-4801>

Łukasz Moll  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2251-9351>

Sara Svensson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4759-7505>

References

(a) Interviews

Danish-Swedish border region

DK_1_m: male Radikale Venstre candidate, 17 June 2024, online

DK_2_m: male Dansk Folkeparti candidate, 17 June 2024, online

DK_3_f: female Det Konservative Folkeparti local party representative, 18 June 2024, online

SE_1_m: male Sverigedemokraterna candidate, 14 May 2024, in person
 SE_2_m: male Liberalerna assistant to candidate, 30 June 2024, in person
 SE_3_f: female Vänsterpartiet candidate, 10 June 2024, online
 SE_4_m: male Moderaterna assistant to candidate, 18 July 2024, online

Franco-German border region

DE_6_m: male Die Grünen candidate from Baden-Württemberg, 11 June 2024, online
 FR_1_f: female Les Républicains candidate from Alsace, 4 June 2024, online
 FR_2_f: female Renaissance candidate from Alsace, 6 June 2024, in person
 FR_3_m: male Parti radical de gauche (PRG) candidate from Moselle, 7 June 2024, in person
 FR_4_m: male La France fière - Reconquête candidate from Alsace, 10 June 2024, in person
 FR_5_m: male La France insoumise candidate from Alsace, 12 June 2024, in person

Polish-German-Czech border region

CZ_1_f: female ANO candidate from the Zlín Region, 30 May 2024, in person
 CZ_2_m: male ODS candidate from the Moravian-Silesian Region, 14 May 2024, online
 CZ_3_m: male STAN candidate from the Olomouc Region, 18 June 2024, in person
 DE_1_f: female SPD candidate from Brandenburg, 30 April 2024, in person
 DE_2_m: male AfD politician from Saxony, 14 May 2024, in person
 DE_3_m: male AfD politician from Saxony, 13 June 2024, in person
 DE_4_m: male Die Linke candidate from Brandenburg, 15 July 2024, online
 DE_5_m: male SPD politician from Saxony, 12 August 2024, online
 PL_1_m: male Bezpартyjni Samorządowcy candidate from dolnośląskie, 16 May 2024, online
 PL_2_m: male PiS candidate from lubuskie, 6 June 2024, in person
 PL_3_f: female Nowa Lewica party official/campaigner from dolnośląskie, 20 June 2024, online
 PL_4_m: male Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość candidate from dolnośląskie, 3 July, in person
 PL_5_f: female Platforma Obywatelska party official/campaigner from dolnośląskie, 8 July, online
 PL_6_m: male Platforma Obywatelska party official/campaigner from lubuskie, 11 July, in person

Slovak-Hungarian border region

HU_1_m: male MHM candidate (Hungary), 21 May 2024, in person
 HU_2_m: male Hungarian Alliance candidate (southern Slovakia), 22 May 2024, online
 HU_3_m: male Fidesz–Magyar Polgári Szövetség candidate (Hungary), 23 May 2024, in person
 HU_4_m: male Fidesz–Magyar Polgári Szövetség border municipality representative (northern Hungary), 24 May 2024, in person
 HU_5_m: male independent border municipality representative (southern Slovakia), 24 May 2024, in person
 HU_6_f: female Fidesz–Magyar Polgári Szövetség candidate (Hungary), 11 June 2024, in person
 HU_7_f: female Momentum Mozgalom candidate (Hungary), 19 June 2024, online
 SK_1_m: male SaS candidate from Bratislava, 4 June 2024, in person
 SK_2_f: female Progresívne Slovensko candidate from Bratislava, 4 June 2024, in person
 SK_3_f: female SaS candidate from Bratislava, 5 June 2024, in person

(b) Literature

Bale, T., C. Green-Pedersen, A. Krouwel, K.R. Luther, and N. Sitter. 2010. If you can't beat them, join them? Explaining social democratic responses to the challenge from the populist radical right in Western Europe. *Political Studies* 58, no. 3: 410–42.

- Balogh, P., and M. Pete. 2018. Bridging the gap: Cross-border integration in the Slovak-Hungarian borderland around Stúrovo-Esztergom. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 33, no. 4: 605–22.
- Biancalana, C., C. Lamour, O. Mazzoleni, G. Yerly, and P. Carls. 2025. Multiscalar strategies in right-wing populism: A comparison of West European parties in borderlands. *Territory, Politics, Governance* 13, no. 7: 941–60.
- Böhm, H., A. Boháč, L. Novotný, E. Drápela, and W. Opiola. 2023. Resilience of cross-border cooperation in the Neisse-Nisa-Nysa Euroregion after the pandemic: Bouncing in-between. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 39, no. 6: 1083–99. doi:10.1080/08865655.2023.2276471.
- Boswell, C., A. Geddes, and P. Scholten. 2011. The role of narratives in migration policy-making: A research framework. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13, no. 1: 1–11.
- Brack, N. 2020. Towards a unified anti-Europe narrative on the right and left? The challenge of Euroscepticism in the 2019 European elections. *Research & Politics* 7, no. 2: 2053168020952236.
- Bürkner, H.J. 2020. Europeanisation versus Euroscepticism: Do borders matter? *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3: 545–66.
- Casaglia, A., R. Coletti, C. Lizotte, J. Agnew, V. Mamadouh, and C. Minca. 2020. Interventions on European nationalist populism and bordering in time of emergencies. *Political Geography* 82: 102238.
- Cavallaro, M., D. Flacher, and M.A. Zanetti. 2018. Radical right parties and European economic integration: Evidence from the seventh European Parliament. *European Union Politics* 19, no. 2: 321–43.
- Clark, N. 2014. Explaining low turnout in European elections: The role of issue salience and institutional perceptions in elections to the European Parliament. *Journal of European Integration* 36, no. 4: 339–56.
- De Vries, C.E., and E.E. Edwards. 2009. Taking Europe to its extremes: Extremist parties and public Euroscepticism. *Party Politics* 15, no. 1: 5–28.
- Downes, J.F., M. Loveless, and A. Lam. 2021. The looming refugee crisis in the EU: Right-wing party competition and strategic positioning. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no. 5: 1103–23.
- Eder, K. 2006. Europe's borders: The narrative construction of the boundaries of Europe. *European Journal of Social Theory* 9, no. 2: 255–71.
- Genschel, P., and M. Jachtenfuchs. 2021. Postfunctionalism reversed: solidarity and rebordering during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 3: 350–69.
- Heinisch, R., D. McDonnell, and A. Werner. 2021. Equivocal Euroscepticism: How populist radical right parties can have their EU cake and eat it. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no. 2: 189–205.
- Hooghe, L., G. Marks, and C.J. Wilson. 2002. Does left/right structure party positions on European integration?. *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 8: 965–89.
- Ivaldi, G. 2018. Contesting the EU in times of crisis: The Front National and politics of Euroscepticism in France. *Politics* 38, no. 3: 278–94.
- Jones, M.D., and M.K. McBeth. 2010. A narrative policy framework: Clear enough to be wrong? *Policy Studies Journal* 38, no. 2: 329–53.
- Klatt, M. 2020. The so-called 2015 migration crisis and Euroscepticism in border regions: Facing re-bordering trends in the Danish-German borderlands. *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3: 567–86.
- Koinova, M., F. Düvell, F. Kalantzi, S. De Jong, C. Kaunert, and M.H. Marchand. 2023. International Politics of Migration in Times of “Crisis” and beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Migration Studies* 11, no. 1: 242–57.
- Krasteva, A. 2020. If borders did not exist, Euroscepticism would have invented them or, on post-communist re/de/re/bordering in Bulgaria. *Geopolitics* 25, no. 3: 678–705.
- Kriesi, H. 2020. Backlash politics against European integration. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22, no. 4: 692–701.
- Kriesi, H., A. Altiparmakis, A. Bojar, and I.E. Oana. 2021. Debordering and re-bordering in the refugee crisis: a case of “defensive integration”. *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 3: 331–49.

- Kriesi, H., E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschie, and T. Frey. 2008. *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lamour, C., and R. Varga. 2020. The border as a resource in rightwing populist discourse: Viktor Orbán and the Diasporas in a multi-scalar Europe. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 35, no. 3: 335–50.
- Lauener, L. 2023. Breaking down public opinion on European integration: The role of national borders. In *National populism and borders*, eds O. Mazzoleni, C. Biancalana, and A. Pilotti, 119–42. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Lorimer, M. 2024. *Europe as ideological resource: European integration and far right legitimization in France and Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mazzoleni, O. 2023. Introduction: National populism and the politicisation of borders in a changing Europe. In *National populism and borders*, eds. Oscar Mazzoleni, Cecilia Biancalana, and Andrea Pilotti, 1–15. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Meijers, M.J. 2017. Contagious Euroscepticism: The impact of Eurosceptic support on mainstream party positions on European integration. *Party Politics* 23, no. 4: 413–23.
- Mudde, C. 2007. *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Newman, D. 2006. The lines that continue to separate us: Borders in our “borderless” world. *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2: 143–61.
- Opiłowska, E. 2025. (De-)Bordering through discursive practices: Ambivalent narratives on the EU external border crises. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 40, no. 6: 1405–24.
- Paasi, A. 1999. Boundaries as social practice and discourse: The Finnish-Russian Border. *Regional Studies* 33, no. 7: 669–80.
- Pirro, A.L., P. Taggart, and S. van Kessel. 2018. The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: Comparative conclusions. *Politics* 38, no. 3: 378–90.
- Plummer, K. 1995. *Telling sexual stories*. London: Routledge.
- Roch, J. 2024. From qualified to conspirative Euroscepticism: How the German AfD frames the EU in multiple crisis. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 32, no. 2: 538–54.
- Roe, E. 1994. *Narrative policy analysis: Theory and practice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rovny, J., R. Bakker, L. Hooghe, S. Jolly, G. Marks, J. Polk, M. Steenbergen, and M. Vachudova. 2025. ‘25 Years of Political Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 1999–2024’, working paper.
- Scharpf, F. 1998. Negative and positive integration in the political economy of European welfare states. In *The Future of European Welfare*, eds. M. Rhodes and Y. Mény, 157–77. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scott, J.W. 2012. European politics of borders, border symbolism and cross-border cooperation. In *A companion to border studies*, eds. T.M Wilson, and D. Hastings, 83–99. Chichester: Blackwell.
- Stone, D. 1988. *Policy paradox and political reason*. London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Svensson, S. 2023. Stäng gränserna, öppna gränserna!: Gränsregionala samarbetsorganisationers reaktioner på gränskontroller och gränsstängningar i Europa. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift* 125, no. 4: 1093–118. [Close the borders, open the borders!: Border regional cooperation organizations’ reactions to border controls and border closures in Europe].
- Taggart, P. 1998. A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems. *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3: 363–88.
- van Kessel, S. 2025. Populism, the far right and EU integration: Beyond simple dichotomies. *Journal of European Integration* 47, no. 1: 127–33.
- Wassenberg, B. 2024. *History of the Council of Europe: 75 Years of European Co-operation*. Strasbourg: Editions of the Council of Europe.