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European Refugee Crisis**

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Angela Merkel's Perception and Open Door Policy during the 2015 European Refugee Crisis

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ABSTRACT

When Europe was hit by the refugee crisis in 2015, Germany as the leader of the European Union implemented policies that contrasted markedly with those of other member countries. Through the Open Door Policy under the command of Angela Merkel, Germany voluntarily opened its borders so that refugees were able to enter its territory. Unfortunately, this policy triggered many protests and rejections from various circles. Among these were members of the general public, opposition parties, Merkel's own party, interest groups and the European Union as a regional umbrella for Germany. The determination of this policy did not involve the participation of the *Bundestag* (level I parliament) in a democratic manner, either. Despite the many objections that arose, Merkel remained adamant about defending and enforcing her controversial policy. This attitude reflects the existence of a separate perspective or perception that Merkel had in seeing the refugee crisis, so she established an Open Door Policy. This paper will shed light on how Angela Merkel's personal perception could have led to her choice of providing protection for refugees despite having to face various forms of resistance. By using the framework of the relationship between perception and decision-making according to Ole R. Holsti, it was found that belief and image systems influenced Angela Merkel's perception that Germany should be the main actor in responding to the refugee crisis that occurred in the European Union region and the rest of the world as well.

Keywords: Perception, Merkel, Open Door Policy, German

Introduction

The issue of global refugees has yet to be resolved. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) even noted that throughout 2018, there were around 70.8 million global refugees in various parts of the world, which previously numbered 68.5 million in 2017.¹ Refugees whose numbers increase every year are a challenge for the international community that requires special attention so that they can be handled optimally. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the definition of a refugee is "Someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being prosecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership

¹BBC, UNHCR : Over 70 Million People Displaced Worldwide, BBC Indonesia, 20 June 2019, <http://www.google.com/amp/s/www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia-48700295.amp>(accessed March 15, 2020)

of a particular social group, or political opinion."² Although these issues have not yet been resolved, the world continues to strive to protect the rights of these refugees. One of the steps taken was establishing the Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugee 1951. Many countries later ratified this protocol, including European countries.

In 2015, the number of refugees coming to Europe doubled from the previous year, reaching 1.25 million people, causing a refugee crisis on the Blue Continent.³ The catalyst for this swift flow of refugees was none other than the prolonged conflictual situation in various regions, particularly the Middle East region. Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were the top three Middle Eastern countries that contributed the most refugees to Europe during the crisis.⁴ Among all European countries, Germany was ranked first as the country receiving the most refugees in 2015. Germany received as many as 441,800 people or 35.2% of the total 1.25 million refugees who were in Europe at the time of the crisis.⁵ Previously in 2014, Germany only received as many as 172,945 inhabitants.

The increasing number of refugees in Germany is due to the opening of entry points through the German policy under Angela Merkel's administration, which is called the Open Door Policy or in German it is also known as the *Flüchtlinge Willkommen* (Welcome to Refugees). The purpose of this policy is enabling refugees to enter German territory without passing through immigration regulations set by the European Union, one of which is the Dublin Regulation. At least 890,000 asylum seekers entered Germany within three months after the policy was implemented in August 2015.⁶ Through this policy, refugees whose asylum applications are accepted by the German government will be entitled to and receive many benefits such as being given temporary housing, daily allowances, work permits and also useful language training so that they can adapt to the local culture.⁷

Angela Merkel is said to have been a key actor in establishing the Open Door Policy. Merkel's rationale is that accepting refugees is a mandate from The 1951 Convention of Refugees which regulates the rights and obligations of refugees.⁸ Reporting from her speech before supporters of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in October 2015, Merkel herself did not deny that this refugee crisis was the largest since World War II during her tenure. However, she remained optimistic by stating "I know it is a tough situation but I will not give up". From this it can be seen that the complexity of the crisis did not undermine her determination to provide protection for refugees.

Along with the increasingly swift inflow of migrants who entered after the policy stipulation, political pressure was getting stronger against Merkel, marked by the decline in the popularity of her party, the CDU and its coalition, the Christian Socialist Union (CSU).⁹ Even more surprisingly, the two parties turned out not to be in line with Merkel's policies. Horst Seehofer, chairman of the CSU sharply criticized Merkel for putting both Germany and Europe at risk.¹⁰ The decline in popularity, on the other hand, was offset by an increase in votes in support of the right-wing party, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) [Alternatives for Germany], which considered that Merkel's policy could increase

²Text Document of Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees with an Introductory Note by the Officer of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

³Eurostat News, "World Refugee Day : Key Statistics on Asylum in the EU", Eurostat Database, 20 June 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/asylum> (accessed March 15, 2020)

⁴Eurostat Newrelease, "Asylum in the EU Member States : Record Number of Over 1.2 Million First Time Asylum Seekers Registered in 2015", 04 March 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016-AP> (accessed March 15, 2020)

⁵ Stivani Ismawira Sinambela, "Migrant Crisis: Open Door Policy Analysis, PIR Journal Vol.2 No.1 (August 2017): 51

⁶Germany's General Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), Integration Media Service

⁷Claire Li, Germany Reevaluates Open Door Policy, available at <http://www.5clpp.com/2016/09/23/germany-reevaluates-open-door-policy> (accessed September 09, 2020)

⁸Sinambela, "Migrant Crisis...", 51

⁹Maysa Abbas Ayoub, "Understanding Germany's Response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis", Review of Economic and Political Science (2019) : 11

¹⁰The Guardian, "Angela Merkel Rejects Criticism of Open Door Refugee Policy", The Guardian, 15 October 2015

the national threat.¹¹The increasing vote of support for the AfD was also supported by the PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* meaning Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) movement, which is a German anti-immigrant and anti-Islam populist group.

Open the widest area for refugees means that Germany has to bear a lot of costs and burdens.¹² At least during the crisis, Germany spent up to 10 billion Euros or the equivalent of 11 billion USD on refugees alone.¹³ In addition, the social consequences faced by Germany are not exactly small fry, either. Between 2014 – 2015 criminal cases in Germany increased by 79% along with a 440% increase in the number of refugees.¹⁴ This is further strengthened by the results of a survey conducted by a think tank called the Pew Research Center, where 61% of Germans believe that refugees increase national threats, particularly terrorism.¹⁵

The impact of this policy is considered not only to provide a national burden on Germany, but also a *domino effect* for other European countries.¹⁶ Moreover, the waiver of the Dublin Regulation which was chosen by Germany turned out to be a violation of agreements with European Union countries.¹⁷ Along with the lack of coordination with the European Union, Merkel has even demanded that the EU should synergize in dealing with the refugee crisis. According to her, there must be a fair distribution of burdens for each European Union country to accommodate the refugees who arrive by setting a mandatory refugee quota.¹⁸ The distribution of the burden of accepting refugees is different in each European Union country, but the burden is mostly borne by Germany.¹⁹ Angela Merkel's government actually had the option not to open its borders through the Open Door Policy. However, Merkel has remained firm about her decision.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that Angela Merkel has played a very dominant role in determining the Open Door Policy. Merkel's choice to continue to implement the Open Door Policy by ignoring input from various parties concerning the heavy national cost clearly indicates that her personal perception of the refugee issue is involved. Until then, this perception prompted her to adopt an Open Door Policy.

Methodology

In this article, Ole R. Holsti's framework of perception and decision-making²⁰ will be operationalized to provide an overview of the relationship between Angela Merkel's perceptions and the establishment of the Open Door Policy. Holsti's work, published in 1962 under the title *Belief System and National Image: A Case Study*, generally explains that the decision-making process, especially regarding foreign policy, cannot be separated from the perceptions of the policy-makers

¹¹Sinambela, "Migrant Crisis", 55

¹²Cynthia Kroet, "Refugee Crisis Cost Germany Over 20 Billion Euro in 2016", Politico, 27 January 2017

¹³DW.Com, "Refugee Crisis 'to Cost Germany 10 Billion Euros'", DW.Com Top Stories, 06 September 2015, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.dw.com/en/refugee-crisis-to-cost-germany-10-billion-euros/a-18696346> (accessed March 15, 2020)

¹⁴Muhammad Al Ghifari, "German Government Policies Addressing the Increase in the Crime Rate of Asylum Seekers as an Impact of the Open Door Policy", *Journal of International Relations* Vol.4 No.3 (2018) : 630

¹⁵Pew Research Center, "Europeans Fear Wave of Refugee Will Mean More Terrorism, Fewer Jobs", *Global Attitude Survey* (Spring 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/07/11/Europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/> (accessed March 16, 2020)

¹⁶Sinambela, "Migrant Crisis", 56

¹⁷Leonard August Schuette, "Collective Memory in Germany and the Great Foreign Policy Debate: The Case of the European Refugee Crisis", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* Vol.3 No.3 – 4 (2018) : 280

¹⁸Ian Trynor and Luke Harding, "Merkel and Hollande Plan EU-Wide Response to Escalating Migration Crisis", *The Guardian*, 24 August 2015.

¹⁹Seyma Akin, "The Effects of the Syrian Crisis on German Politics", *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2017) : 84

²⁰Ole R. Holsti, "The Belief System and National Image : A Case Study", *Conflict Resolution* Vol.6 No.3 (1962) : 244-252

involved. In line with what Holsti said, other experts such as Boulding²¹, Festinger²² and Ray²³ agree that decision-makers can act on the image of the situation rather than relying on the objective reality in front of them.

Holsti's analytical framework is quite simple. Quoted from his writing, Holsti explained that a belief system consists of a series of images that form an individual's perspective or point of view in seeing something. The existing images consist of past reality, present reality, expected reality to occur in the future and values about what should happen. Consequently, it can be concluded that the belief system is a set of information items related to the environment that surrounds individuals and can influence the goals they will set and the decisions they will take.

There are two models for the relationship between belief systems and the decision-making process. The first is an indirect relationship where information will be processed first in a belief system. The input that is absorbed by the individual through events that are directly experienced or indirectly will lead individuals to a belief that is built within them. The second is a direct relationship which in the belief system is also referred to as what should happen.

Analysis

a. Belief System and Image of the Past, Present and Future According to Angela Merkel

The *Open Door Policy* is one of the policies that reflects the involvement of Angela Merkel's belief system in policy making. On August 24, 2015, the German government officially established an Open Door Policy to respond to the refugee crisis that occurred in Europe at that time. The purpose of this policy is to provide protection for refugees who have fled their country. The protection measures include the provision of housing, daily allowances, language training, employment training and also granting work permits.

Merkel's choice of policy has in fact invited more criticism and generated opposition than support. The opposition camp consisting of the public, interest groups, shade parties, opposition parties and the European Union have a common ground for their rejection, namely that the Open Door Policy will only create a national and regional socio-economic burden. Besides that, the rejection contains ideological expressions as shown by the interest group PEGIDA and the AfD party as the most vocal opposition party against Merkel's policy.

In terms of the formation of an indirect belief system, input comprises various kinds of information obtained by individual decision-makers that will guide them in determining a policy choice. Regarding the establishment of the Open Door Policy, Angela Merkel's first input of information consisted of two major historical events in Germany, namely the Holocaust and German reunification. The input actually departs from the history of Angela Merkel's own life journey. Although not yet born at the time of the Holocaust, at least Merkel can understand that reality has been ingrained as a historical image of Germany, in the eyes of her own people and internationally since the end of the event. It is certainly not surprising that as a German citizen, Merkel sees major historical events such as the Holocaust as a basis of urgency for her country's policies. Five months before inaugurating the Open Door Policy, during her visit to Japan when she met Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Merkel explained her country's desire to improve its reputation in the eyes of the world as a result of the incident. She stated "We Germans will never forget the hand of reconciliation that was extended

²¹Kenneth E. Boulding, "The Image", Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press (1956): 5-6

²²Leon Festinger, "A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance", Evanston III : Row, Peterson & Co. (1957)

²³JC Ray, "The Indirect Relationship Between Belief System and Action in Soviet-American Interaction", Stanford University (1961)

to us after all the suffering that our country had brought to Europe and the world".²⁴ Furthermore, for the German reunification event, Merkel felt and saw first-hand the reality that occurred because she grew up and developed as an individual in that era.

The Holocaust is the largest genocidal crime event in the history of the world that occurred in the era of World War II between 1941-1945.²⁵ The Holocaust itself was a Nazi attempt to conquer Europe which in practice killed six million people or 2/3 of the total Jewish population on the European continent at that time. The massacre, which was commanded by Adolf Hitler, was based on hatred of ethnic Jews who were considered a threat to Germany. As a result, 12 million inhabitants of Germany were forced to flee from the chaos that had hit their country to other European countries such as Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Poland.²⁶ The historian RM Douglas described that this phenomenon was not only the largest forced migration but also the largest non-forced migration in the history of mankind.²⁷ He also mentioned that this mass migration was sponsored by acts of violence and terror committed by the state, including acts of murder, torture, and rape.²⁸

This dark event ended in 1945, marked by the end of World War II. But the end of World War II is not the end point for the world in achieving peace. Even though the war had ended (marked by the defeat of Germany and Hitler's death by suicide), other problems arose. This caused German refugees who were in the destination countries mentioned above to be forced back to their countries by the allied forces, thus reigniting the phenomenon of the great mass migration in Europe.

The second event was the phenomenon of the reunification of West Germany and East Germany in 1990. The fall of the Berlin Wall as a silent witness to reunification caused large-scale social panic. The reason was that as many as 15 million inhabitants of East Germany who for decades since 1949 had been shackled to an authoritarian government system massively migrated from the East to the West which was more promising.²⁹ As a result, over a period of 3 years there was public panic and about 6000 more cases of xenophobic attacks.

Seeing this situation, the German government was prompted to issue a *cordon sanitaire* under the Asylum Procedure Law in July 1993. The regulation established restrictions on people who wished to enter German territory. The refugee quota, which originally amounted to 225,000 people, was reduced to 100,000 people as an annual quota. It was also through this regulation that the government restricted the movement of refugees and began to reduce financial assistance by 20-30% for individuals.

Both of these humanitarian phenomena haven't given Germany's image a bad name in the eyes of the world, personified as "The Ugly German". Germany's purge of certain groups that caused millions of people to lose their lives and their homes so they had to flee to other countries, as well as reports of attacks and violence against migrants after reunification became the justification for this label.³⁰ It had an effect on the individual and the German government in the future.³¹ According to

²⁴Greg Rienzi, "Other Nations Could Learn From Germany's Efforts to Reconcile After WW II", John Hopkins Magazine, <https://hub.jhu.edu/magazine/2015/summer/germany-japan-reconciliation/> (accessed November 02, 2020)

²⁵Muhammad Akbar William, "Analyzing the Holocaust and the Practice of the Conception of Lebensraum as a Dark History of Genocide in the Long Journey of Human Civilization from the Eyes of Realism", (2019) : 1

²⁶Joyce Marie Mushaben, "Wir Schaffen Das! Angela Merkel and the European Refugee Crisis", German Politics Vol.26 No.4 (2017) : 516

²⁷The Washington Post, "The Forgotten Story of When the Germans were the Refugees", <https://www.thewashingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/03/the-forgotten-story-of-when-the-germans-were-the-refugees/?outputType=amp>, 03 September 2015, (accessed 10 October 2020)

²⁸Adam Taylor, "The Forgotten Story of When the Germans were the Refugees"; ElisabethDewi, "International Migration and Indonesian Foreign Policy", Scientific Journal of International Relations 9, no. 1 (2014). <https://doi.org/10.26593/jihi.v9i1.535.%p>

²⁹Mushaben, "Wir Schaffen Das!...", 521

³⁰Anson Rabinbach, "The Return of the Ugly German?", Dissent Magazine (Spring 1992), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-return-of-the-ugly-german> (accessed October 14, 2020)

³¹Wardhani, "The Role of Trauma and Memory...", 154

Langenbacher and Shain, German society has absorbed the legacy of the Holocaust into German identity.³² Meanwhile, according to Rabinbach, the brutality and self-restriction of immigrants after reunification is a sign of the revival of "The Ugly German" after the Holocaust preceded it.³³ The two historical events that shaped Germany's national image, thus building a belief system from Merkel's past and influencing her decisions, validate the logic of thinking that state policies are not always born from interactions between countries, but are also born through distortions in the national image of decision-makers.³⁴

Besides the phenomena sketched above, the condition of the world that is filled with chaos is another kind of input for information that has obviously affected Merkel's belief system. In 2015, the number of refugees coming to Europe doubled from the previous year, reaching 1.25 million people, causing a refugee crisis on the Blue Continent.³⁵ The catalyst for this massive flow of refugees was none other than the prolonged conflictual situation in various regions, particularly the Middle East region. Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were the top three Middle Eastern countries that contributed the most refugees to Europe during the crisis. There were 362,775 Syrian citizens, 178,230 Afghans and 121,535 Iraqis.³⁶

The phenomenon of Middle Eastern refugees did not only occur in 2015. Previously, migration from the Middle East had occurred since the Arab Spring that had hit several countries such as Syria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt starting in 2011. In addition, the civil war that occurred in Afghanistan caused many of its citizens to feel reluctant about staying and to prefer better shelters. Furthermore, the condition of the Middle East at the time of the Arab Spring of course experienced widespread destruction and economic and social crises due to the considerable amount of infrastructure that had been destroyed.

In addition, the Arab Spring caused social crises such as ubiquitous looting and various other crimes. Although the Arab Spring achieved its goals in some countries, such as Tunisia, Libya and Egypt which succeeded in overthrowing their government power, the existence of the ruling regime that was still in power in Syria under the leadership of Bashar Al-Assad still left a great deal of tension. As a result, Syrians tried to seek refuge in other countries around them, such as Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey. Before they even made it to these destinations, the Syrian refugees were trying to find shelter in Europe and the number has been increasing since 2011.³⁷

The input information received by Merkel was subsequently processed into Merkel's belief system to build a perception. The belief system consists of images that occur in the past, present and future. For images related to the past, what must have crossed Merkel's mind is that the 2015 European refugee crisis phenomenon paints the same portrait as her country's past history. As previously explained, Germany had experienced two major events that sparked the phenomenon of massive refugee migration, such as during World War II (Holocaust) and during German reunification in 1990.

In this regard, Merkel herself once stated "The mass murder of six million Jews, carried out in the name of Germany, has brought indescribable suffering to the Jewish people, Europe and the entire

³²E. Langenbacher and Y. Shain, "Power and The Past : Collective Memory and International Relations, Washington DC : George Town University Press (2010) : 51 - 52

³³Anson Rabinbach, "The Return of the Ugly German?", *Dissent Magazine* (Spring 1992), <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/the-return-of-the-ugly-german> (accessed October 14, 2020)

³⁴Quincy Wright, "Design for a Research Project on International Conflict and the Factors Causing Their Aggravation or Amelioration", *Western Political Quarterly* No.10 (1957): 266

³⁵Eurostat News, "World Refugee Day : Key Statistics on Asylum in the EU", Eurostat Database, 20 June 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/news/themes-in-the-spotlight/asylum> (accessed March 15, 2020)

³⁶Eurostat Newrelease, "Asylum in the EU Member States : Record Number of Over 1.2 Million First Time Asylum Seekers Registered in 2015", 04 March 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016-AP> (accessed March 15, 2020)

³⁷Fahri Hamzah, "State, Market and People: Searching for Meaning, Relevance and Purpose", Indonesian Faham Foundation (2011): 31

world. The Shoah (Holocaust) fills us Germans with shame. I bow before the survivors and before all those who helped them survive".³⁸ The statement that she made before the Israeli parliament in 2008 implied her feelings as an individual that the events of the dark times had really tarnished Germany's image in the eyes of the world. Meanwhile, on another occasion, before the *Bundestag* she stated "It is no exaggeration to see this task as a historic test of Europe".³⁹ The statement implies that according to Merkel, the 2015 European refugee crisis was indeed a repetition of historical tests, given the two historical events above.

In this light, the present image that Merkel projects is in line with her past image. When dealing with refugees, Merkel saw that Germany and the European Union showed an attitude of rejection. The incoming refugees are seen as a threat to Germany's national stability and a disturbance to the European Union region. Based on data by the Pew Research Center, 61% of Germans believe refugees will increase the number of terrorism cases.⁴⁰ Furthermore, data published by INSA Opinion Trend, out of 2,043 respondents, 33.3% initially rejected the Open Door Policy and still disagreed. The percentage distribution of other respondents is 25.7% initially supported and still supports, 4.6% rejected at the beginning and finally supported, 17.6% supported at the beginning and subsequently opposed and 18.8% did not give an opinion. This means that if the number of opponents of this policy is calculated, it is the largest, which amounts to 50.9%,⁴¹ not to mention the rejection shown by CDU – CSU as a party supporting Great Britain, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic closed their doors.

Based on Merkel's view, rejecting the arrival of refugees who seek protection for their survival is tantamount to degrading human dignity. On August 26, 2015, a few days after the Open Door Policy was inaugurated, Merkel defended her policy by saying "*No tolerance for those who question the dignity of others, no tolerance for those who are not willing to help where legal and human help is required*".⁴² She made the statement against the right-wing populist protesters who mocked and shouted at her as "Volks Verräterin" which means traitor of the people when Merkel arrived in the city center of the Heidenau area. In addition, on the same occasion Merkel claimed that her policy was still supported by many parties by saying "The number of people...helping strangers get through cities and communities and even taking them into their homes is far greater than the number of xenophobes".⁴³ Merkel's remarks show her optimism for her policies and her attempt to break the assumptions of the protestors. Furthermore, before the European People's Party Congress on 23 October 2015 Merkel stated "*Everyone that arrives in Europe has the right to be treated like a human being! We did not create the Charter of Fundamental Rights so that we could treat people from other places inhumanely*".

Based on images of the past and present, Merkel produces an image of what will happen in the future. Merkel realizes that the attitude of Germany and the European Union in refusing the arrival of refugees will only worsen the national image of Germany and also the European Union as a supranational institution that is respected in the eyes of the world. The superiority and toughness of Germany and the European Union should be able to form a solution to the current refugee crisis. The refusal of Germany and the European Union in the midst of their moral responsibilities as democratic

³⁸China Daily, "Germans are Filled with Shame – Merkel", December 2008, http://chinadaily.com.cn/world/2008-03/19/content_6547713.htm (accessed October 14, 2020)

³⁹DW.com, "Merkel : Refugee Crisis a 'Historic Test' of Europe", 15 October 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/merkel-refugee-crisis-a-historic-test-of-europe/a18784341> (accessed October 14, 2020)

⁴⁰Pew Research Center

⁴¹INSA Opinion Trend, "Poll : What is your opinion of Angela Merkel's refugee policy?", <https://www.dw.com/en/merkel-germany-refugees/a-54769229> (accessed October 10, 2020)

⁴²BBC, "Migrants Crisis : Merkel Vows 'No Tolerance' of Migrant Hatred", 26 August 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34061532> (accessed October 15, 2020)

⁴³BBC, "Migrant Crisis : Merkel Warns of EU 'Failure'", 31 August 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/new/world-europe-34108224> (accessed October 15, 2020)

institutions is highly contradictory to the values of humanity and freedom as they have been closely attached to their identities.⁴⁴ The future predictions, of course, come from the present image captured by Merkel.

b. The Image That Should Happen (Value) According to Angela Merkel

The rejection, pressure and sharp criticism received by Angela Merkel regarding her policy of opening the door to Germany as wide as possible for refugees did not make her waver. Even though her popularity was in line with the electability of her party during the election which fell sharply, Merkel did not use it as the reason she stopped fighting for her decision. Merkel's firm stance is the result of her parents' strict upbringing and discipline. In addition, the moral and humanitarian aspects of her policies can be seen from Merkel's family background, as she came from a devout Protestant Christian family. "I grew up in a family, where Christianity formed not only the way of life but also the attitude towards life." The good teachings of Protestant Christianity seem to have been deeply rooted in Merkel if we look at her statement. In addition, Protestant teachings also uphold human values. "If we pin our hopes on the power of freedom, then we are pinning them on humanity. Humanity is at the center"⁴⁵ Merkel's remarks at the celebration of Germany's election as president of the European Union in 2007 showed that aspects of humanity and the freedom of every human being are the most salient considerations for Merkel.

Apart from implementation based on the divine values that Merkel adheres to, Protestant Christianity is also known as a religion that is quite tolerant of multiculturalism and pluralism. So that when facing groups of refugees with different racial, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds from hers, Merkel with all the goodness in herself accepted them with open arms in her country. In fact, not a few domestic actors, including the German public, voiced their refusal, especially right-wing populist parties and groups.

One of the reasons for the rejection of the policy is the development of anti-Muslim narratives in Europe and especially Germany by right-wing populist and ultranationalist groups. Considering that many refugees come from Muslim countries, it is not surprising that the momentum of this policy stipulation has become a fertile ground for the anti-Muslim protest movement. In fact, in Germany itself, the right-wing populist AfD party was able to garner significant votes after three years of being founded in 2013.

In the elections held in March 2016, The AfD was able to win in the state elections by winning 24.2% of the vote in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, 12.56 in the Rhineland-Palatinate, and 15.1% in Baden-Württemberg.⁴⁶ Likewise with the regional elections which were held on September 4, 2016, AfD again won. In the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the AfD won 20.8% of the vote, beating the CDU with only 19%.⁴⁷ The climax was when the AfD again won 14.1% of the vote in the Berlin state election on September 18. In stark contrast to the large CDU-CSU coalition which was only able to garner 17.6% of the vote. From the election data, it can be seen that the increase in the AfD's electability as a right-wing populist representative in Germany signifies widespread public

⁴⁴MS Yayusman, "Three Models of Democracy Promotion According to Lavenex and Schimmelfennig: Contribution of the European Union in Increasing Democracy in Myanmar", *Scientific Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 1 (2021): 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.26593/jihi.v17i1.3543.121-137>

⁴⁵Cornelius, "Angela Merkel: The Chancellor and Her World", 142

⁴⁶DW.com, "German State Elections: Success for Right-Wing AfD, Losses for Merkel's CDU", 2016, <http://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.dw.com/en/german-state-elections-success-for-right-wing-afd-losses-for-merkels-cdu/a-19113604> (accessed October 06, 2020)

⁴⁷DW.com, "Merkel's CDU Trounced in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania", 2016, <http://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.dw.com/en/merkels-cdu-trounced-in-mecklenburg-western-pomerania/a-19526082> (accessed October 06, 2020)

skepticism towards refugees, especially those of Muslim faith along with widespread rejection of Merkel's Open Door Policy.

The European Union being a platform of cooperation for Germany, Merkel also shows signs of rejection. Britain, France, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia closed their borders at the beginning of the crisis in 2015. The Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orban was the person who most strongly criticized Merkel's policies. During his visit to Brussels on 3 September 2015, Orban said "There is a conflict between Hungary and Germany".⁴⁸ This implies quite a lot of conflicting ideas between the two as fellow members of the European Union regarding the management of refugees in the European Union. As previously explained, Merkel hopes that the EU will synergize in dealing with the refugee problem. Merkel's hope can be seen from her statements that directly or indirectly encourage the unity of the European Union in dealing with the refugee crisis.

On 30 August 2015 at the European Union Council Meeting, in her speech Merkel stated that *"If Europe fails on the question of refugees, then it won't be the Europe we wished for"*. Europe must move to find a common solution as a unified whole in order to alleviate the current refugee crisis. Europe's failure to respond to the refugee crisis does not reflect a strong and well-integrated Europe as expected. In the Anne Will Political Talkshow on October 9 2015, Merkel again touched on the European Union by stating "It is not in our power how many refugees come to Germany. Refugees are not people who have recklessly decided to leave their homes but people who are running for their lives. *I am proud we receive refugees warmly. I'm not interested in getting into a contest to see who is the most unfriendly in Europe"*.

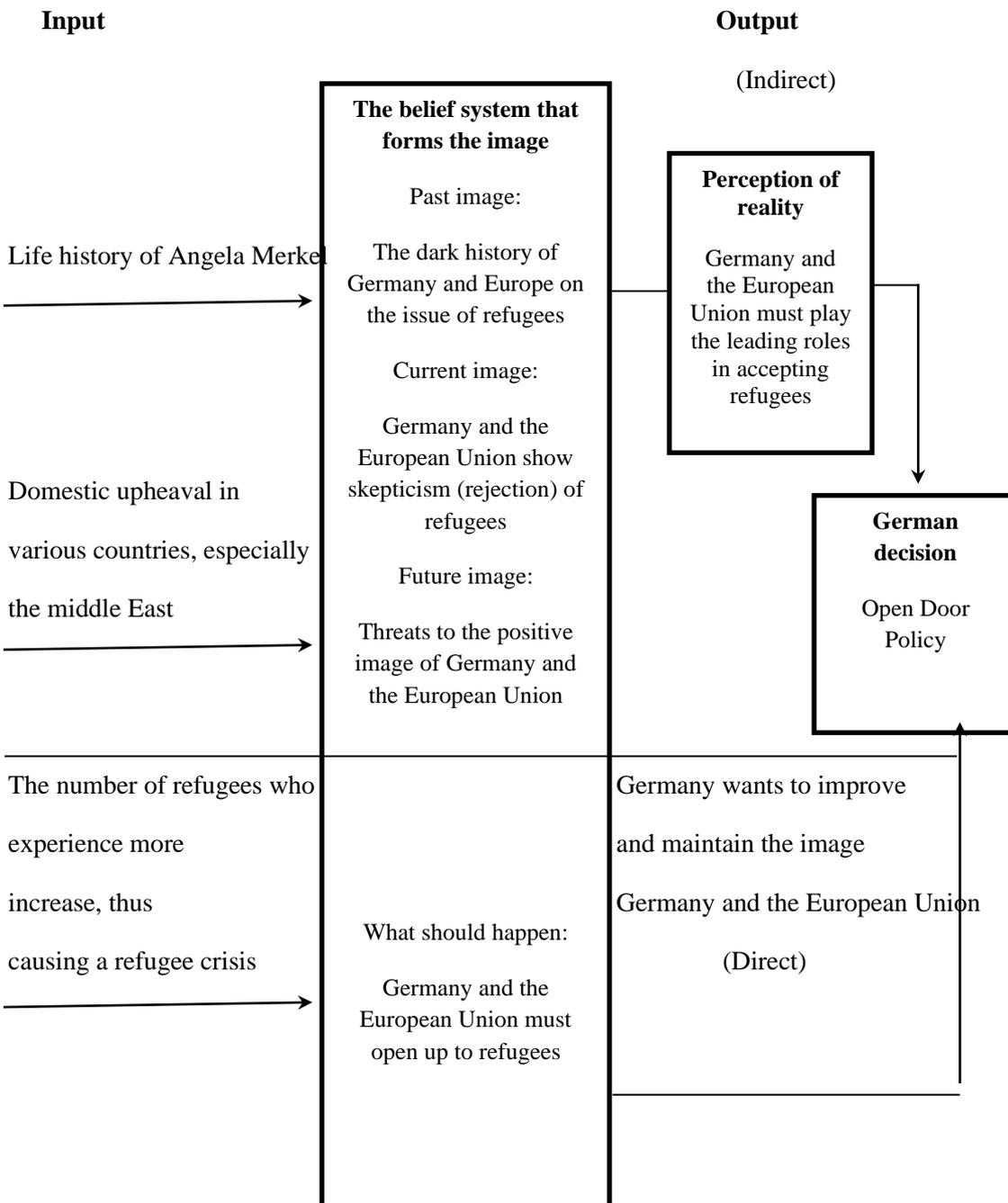
On 16 October 2015 at the European Council Meeting in Brussels, Merkel again emphasized the importance of the European Union to be a leading role for countries around and outside the European Union to participate in the fair distribution of refugee quotas in order to show European solidarity through her statement "In the interests of sharing the burden and demonstrating solidarity with neighboring states it is right for the European Union to consider how it can become involved"

c. Merkel's Perceptions of Reality and Decisions

Associated with belief systems, perception of individual reality can be generated through the image of what happened in the past, present and future. Perception is the result of an indirect relationship between belief systems and decision-making where previously there was processing of information received by individuals. This study observes that Merkel's perception of reality is very closely related to the image of the past, present and future according to her. Based on these three images, through the past history that she has directly or indirectly experienced, as well as from Merkel's study of the present and future realities, it can be seen that the core goal of Merkel's policy is the normalization of Germany's image in the eyes of the international community.

Departing from this, it follows that in order to improve the image of Germany according to Angela Merkel's perception, Germany should play a leading role for the region and the European Union, taking on a leading role for the international community in terms of accepting refugees. This perception subsequently led Merkel to establish an Open Door Policy to respond to the 2015 European refugee crisis. The process of managing information thus became a belief system regarding the image of the past, present and future. Angela Merkel's perception and policy-making of Open Door Policy can be simplified by way of the chart below .

⁴⁸Euractiv, "Merkel Response to Orban's Criticism", September 4, 2015, <https://www.euractive.com/section/economy-jobs/news/merkel-responds-to-orban-s-criticisms/> (accessed October 15, 2020)



Conclusion

The influence of Angela Merkel's perception on determining the German Open Door Policy has been analyzed using the framework of Ole R. Holsti. First, information as input for Merkel's belief system consists of her personal life history, domestic upheaval in various countries, especially the Middle East and the surge in the number of refugees that caused the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. The information has two patterns of relationship with Merkel's decision, namely: an indirect relationship where information will be processed through a belief system consisting of past, present and future images so as to form perceptions of reality as well as a direct relationship related to what should happen according to Merkel (values).

These inputs form Merkel's belief system regarding the image of the past, present and future. The image of the past according to Merkel is that Germany and Europe have a past history of refugees from the Holocaust and German reunification. The current image according to Merkel is Germany and the European Union showing skepticism and rejection of refugees and is a portrait of repetition of the past. Then, according to Merkel, the future image is the threat to the positive image of Germany and the European Union in the eyes of the world if they continue to refuse refugees.

The image subsequently forms a perception of reality, namely Germany and the European Union must play the leading roles in dealing with the refugee crisis. Meanwhile, according to Merkel, the value to be adopted or concrete measure to be taken is that Germany and the European Union must open themselves up to the arrival of refugees. So, based on these direct and indirect relationships, Merkel came up with her decision to adopt Germany's Open Door Policy as a response to the 2015 European refugee crisis.

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