Communicating EUrope: Discourse, Legitimacy, and Crises

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Legitimacy and Discourse

How the **EU** builds **legitimacy** through **discourse** (or how the EU communicates about policies and itself)

Legitimizing decisions (especially sensitive and controversial ones)
→ necessary to ensure citizens' support for the project and for implementation and efficiency of measures

Legitimation → **communication from institutions and institutional leaders**

→ communication = key tool to connect with citizens
→ communication happens through discourse
→ **legitimacy** = result of interactive political process between rulers and citizens

Discourse and Ideas

Perspective: top-down cultivation of legitimacy, image preservation and/or restoration by EU rulers with a focus on ideas, and more specifically the idea of Europe

Ideas are strongly related to power (Beland and Cox 2011; Carstensen and Schmidt 2016; Parsons 2007; Schmidt 2002)
- → ideas provide **interpretive frameworks** that give definition to a society's values, beliefs, and ideologies
- → make political and economic interests actionable
- → significant in legitimizing decisions but often underestimated

- ✓ focus on the power of (through, over and in) **ideas**
- ✓ in specific **contexts**
- ✓ by **EU institutional actors**

Drawing from Discursive Institutionalism (Schmidt 2002, 2008), discourse-historical analysis (Krzyzanowki, 2016; Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), and content (thematic) analysis.

Discourse, Legitimacy, and Idea of EUrope

Recent (changing) discourse on Europe towards legitimation ends: Ukraine and the security crisis

"Putin is trying to subjugate a friendly **European country**. And he is trying to **redraw the maps of Europe** by force." (Von der Leyen, 2022)

"But I am sure: Nobody in this hemicycle can doubt that **a people that stands up so bravely for our European values belongs in our European family**." (Von der Leyen, 2022)

Ursula von der Leyen ✔
@vonderleyen
...

Ukraine's membership application is an expression of their will and their right to choose their own destiny.

Today we have opened the pathway towards us for Ukraine.

They are part of the European family.

Autres pays d'Europe

- Andorre (EN | •••)
- Arménie (EN | •••)
- Azerbaïdjan (EN | •••)
- Biélorussie (EN | •••)
- Géorgie (EN | •••)
- Islande (EN | •••)
- Liechtenstein (EN | •••)
- Moldavie (EN | •••)

- Monaco (EN | •••)
- Norvège (EN | •••)
- Royaume-Uni (EN | •••)
- Russie (EN | •••)
- Saint-Marin (EN | •••)
- Saint-Siège (EN | •••)
- Suisse (DE | •••)
- Ukraine (EN | •••)

Source: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries_fr → changed in 2022, now listing EU members only

Carte

Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

First study: how the EU used the idea of Europe-anness to legitimize **enlargements**

1st requirement for EU **eligibility**: **"European State"** (Article 49 TEU)

→ stable formulation: since the ECSC treaty, 1951
→ never defined in EU law
→ EU Commission: provides an opinion on applicant states' eligibility and, thus, interpret the formulation

Article 49 TEU (membership clause)

Any European State which respects the *values* referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. (…)
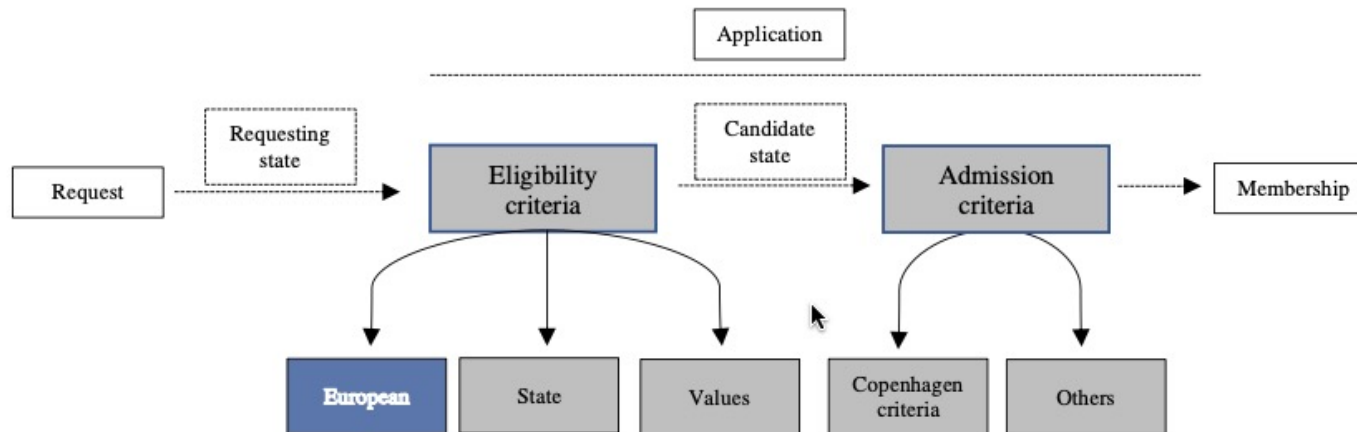
Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

RQ: Interpretations of the "European State" formulation in the discourse of the EU institutions

Main **ideas, narratives, and representations** used to assess whether a state is European

How these interpretations relate (or not) to **wider ideas of Europe-anness** pre- and co-existing in the public space?
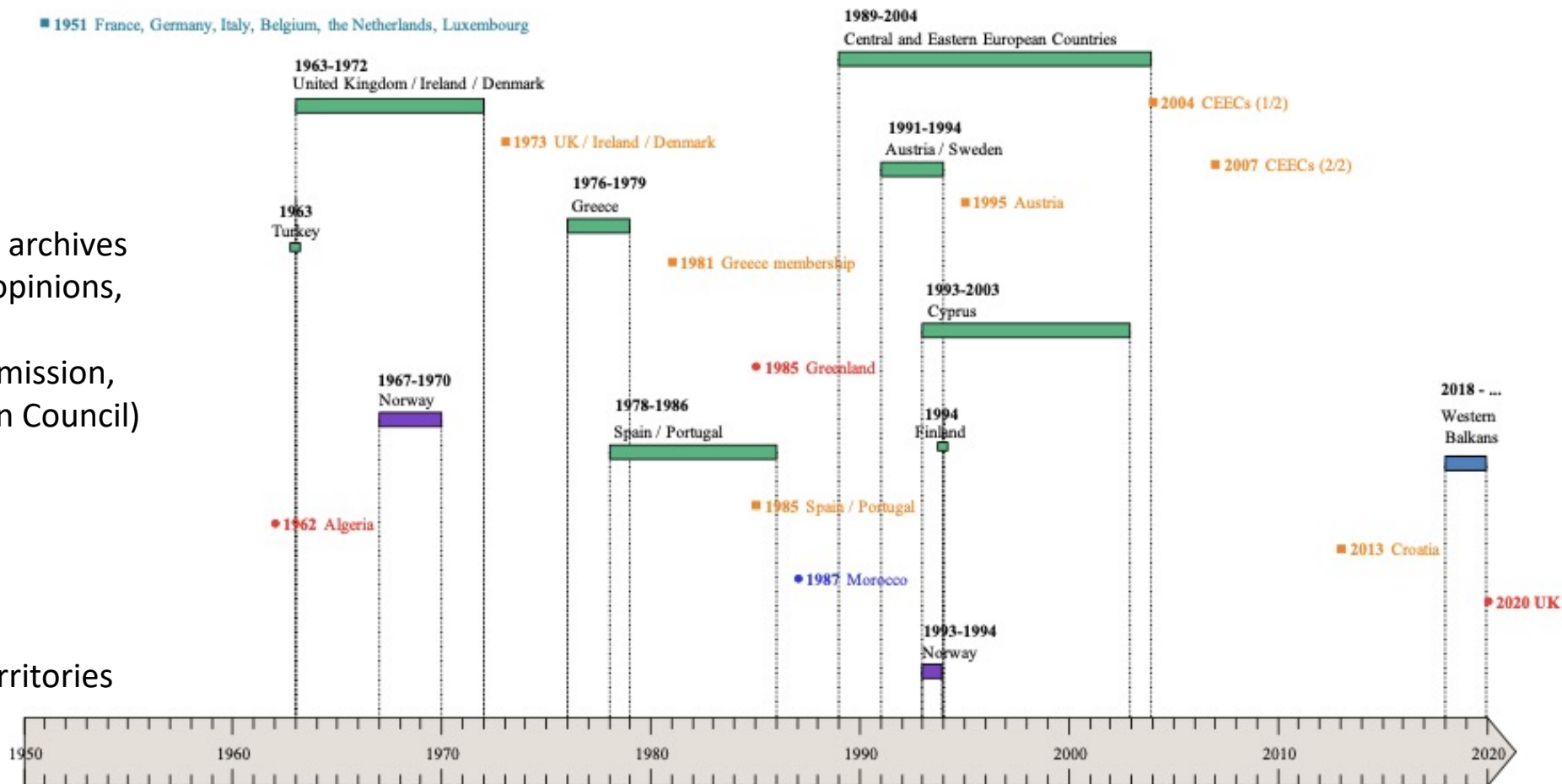
Context of production of interpretations (when, who, in which types of documents?)

Legitimation dynamics surrounding the EU discourse on Europe-anness?

Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

Corpus

→ From 1951 to 2019
→ Institutional documents from archives (treaty drafts, Commission's opinions, official communications, etc)
→ EU political institutions (Commission, Parliament, Council, European Council)
→ Focus on
  - enlargements
  - creation of the Six
  - enlargement denials
  - withdrawals
  - inclusion of overseas territories

■ 1951 France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg

1963–1972 United Kingdom / Ireland / Denmark

■ 1973 UK / Ireland / Denmark

1989–2004 Central and Eastern European Countries

■ 2004 CEECs (1/2)

1991–1994 Austria / Sweden

■ 2007 CEECs (2/2)

1976–1979 Greece

■ 1995 Austria

1963 Turkey

■ 1981 Greece membership

1993–2003 Cyprus

1967–1970 Norway

● 1985 Greenland

2018 – ... Western Balkans

1978–1986 Spain / Portugal

1994 Finland

■ 1985 Spain / Portugal

● 1962 Algeria

■ 2013 Croatia

● 1987 Morocco

● 2020 UK

1993–1994 Norway

1950   1960   1970   1980   1990   2000   2010   2020

Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

4 main interpretations of EUrope-anness, each encompassing several types of interconnected and intertwined ideas and representations:

Geographical	Cultural	Historical	Political
European continent Geographical Europe Geographical ties	European culture European civilization Cultural heritage Cultural traditions Cultural ties	European history Common heritage Historical ties	European political system European values Common ideals Political traditions Political heritage Common humanist tenets

Legitimizing enlargement through discourse
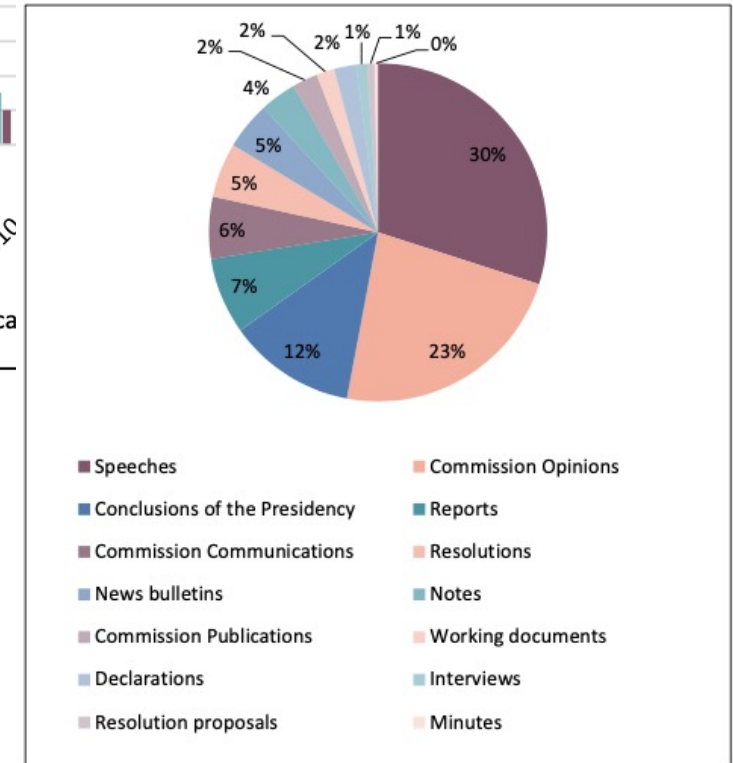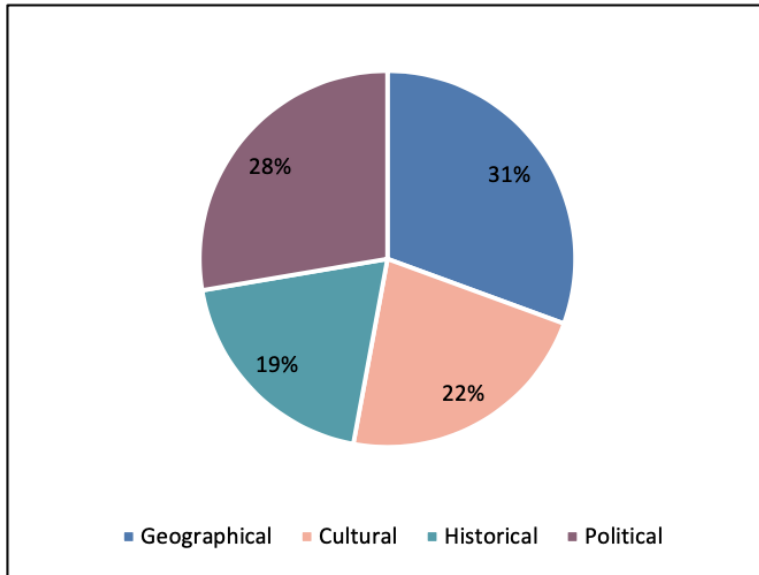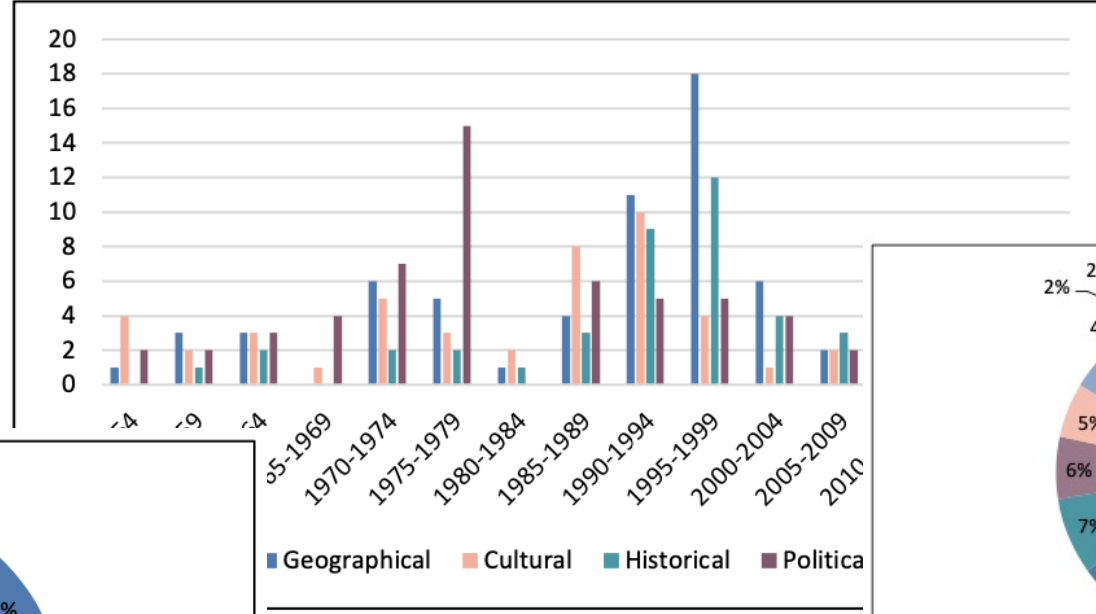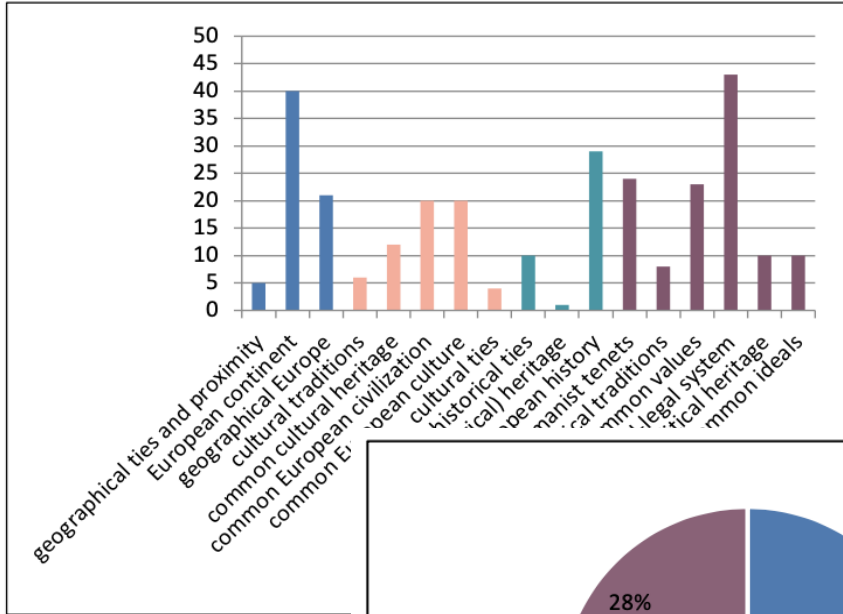
Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

A few examples

Cyprus → cultural narrative (or *How to legitimize a geographically borderline case*)

→ Geographically remote from the continent/not in line with conventional interpretation of geographical Europe
→ Legitimation: Cyprus shares a common cultural heritage with Europe and other European countries, specifically Greece which is "the cradle of the European cultural heritage" (includes democratic values).

Spain (+ Portugal) → political narrative (the "*avant-la-lettre* European value

→ 1962: association request with a view to membership denied
→ 1975: applicant status granted
→ Legitimation narrative: Franco's Spain was not a European State as it did Europe (democracy, human rights, etc.)

Legitimizing enlargement through discourse

A few examples

Morocco vs overseas territories, Algeria → geographical narrative (the "from the Atlantic to the Ural" narrative)

→ Application denied in 1987: "not part of the European area" → Europe stops at the Straits of Gibraltar
→ Yet, French Algeria was part of the EEC until 1962
→ Outermost Regions: part of the EU
→ Turkey does not entirely fit into this conventional definition of Europe

CEECs → historical (+ geographical) narrative (the "historical reconciliati...

→ Cold War: CEECs are not European States in the EU discourse (for poli...
→ Legitimation narrative at the end of the Cold War: they were part of E...
   before the Cold War) but they lost their Europeanness during the Col...

Geographical
Cultural
Historical
Political

GEOGRAPHICAL TIES AND PROXIMITY
- Geographical proximity
- Geographical ties

GEOGRAPHICAL EUROPE
- Peoples of Europe
- Europe as geographical reality
- Geographical position in Europe
- Europe (clear geographical meaning)
- Geographical elements from European identity
- Western Europe/people
- States of Europe
- Geographically European
- Geographically part of Europe

EUROPEAN CONTINENT
- Continental responsibilities
- Peoples of the continent
- Continent of Europe
- (European) continent

COMMON HUMANIST TENETS
- social justice/progress
- free peoples
- human rights
- fundamental freedoms/rights
- individual/public liberties
- equality and non-discrimination

EUROPEAN-LIKE POLITICAL-LEGAL SYSTEM
- Laws and institutions
- Common political system
- Preeminence of law
- Democratic regime/community/state
- Rule of law
- Liberal political organisations
- Political and social bases
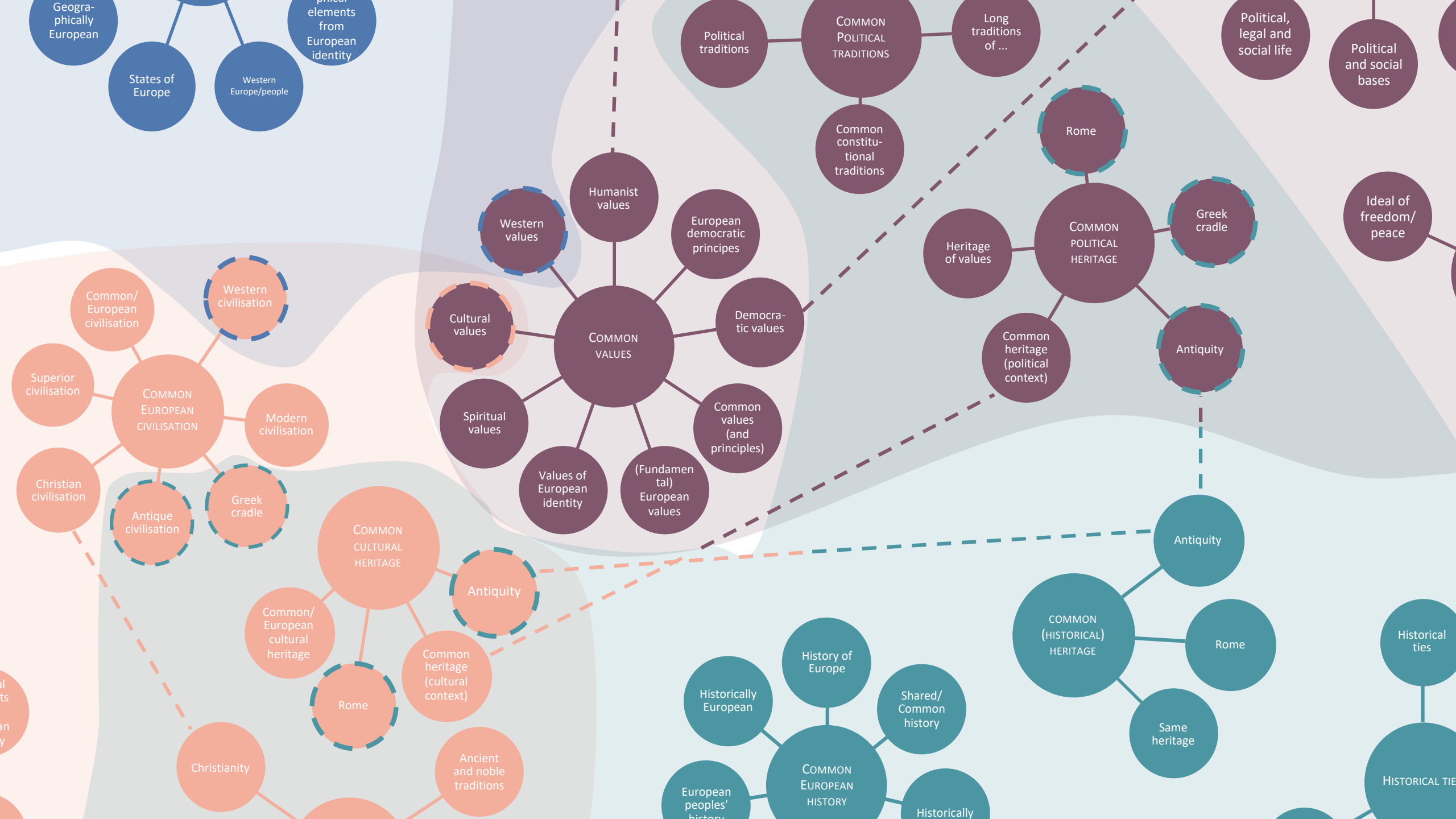- Political, legal and social life
- Free/democratic institutions/states
- Legal, political and moral order
- Decolonisation

COMMON POLITICAL TRADITIONS
- (Western) democratic traditions
- Political traditions
- Long traditions of ...
- Common constitutional traditions

COMMON VALUES
- Humanist values
- Western values
- European democratic principes
- Democratic values
- Common values (and principles)
- (Fundamental) European values
- Values of European identity
- Spiritual values
- Cultural values

COMMON POLITICAL HERITAGE
- Rome
- Greek cradle
- Antiquity
- Common heritage (political context)
- Common heritage (political context)
- Heritage of values

COMMON IDEALS
- Shared/same ideals
- Ideal of freedom/peace
- Democratic ideal

COMMON EUROPEAN CIVILISATION
- Common/European civilisation
- Western civilisation
- Modern civilisation
- Greek cradle
- Antique civilisation
- Christian civilisation
- Superior civilisation

CULTURAL TIES
- Cultural ties

COMMON EUROPEAN CULTURE
- Shared/Common/Same culture
- Cultural elements for European identity
- European peoples' culture
- Culturally
- Cultural identity of Europe
- (European) Culture(s)

COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE
- Antiquity
- Common/European cultural heritage
- Common heritage (cultural context)
- Rome

CULTURAL TRADITIONS
- Christianity
- Ancient and noble traditions
- Scientific traditions
- Art tradictions

COMMON EUROPEAN HISTORY
- History of Europe
- Shared/Common history
- Historically European
- Historically
- European peoples' history
- Historical elements form European identity
- United by history

COMMON (HISTORICAL) HERITAGE
- Antiquity
- Rome
- Same heritage

HISTORICAL TIES
- Historical ties
- Historical interaction
- Deep-longstanding ties

Geographically European

States of Europe

Western Europe/people

...phical elements from European identity

COMMON POLITICAL TRADITIONS

Political traditions

Long traditions of ...

Common constitutional traditions

Political, legal and social life

Political and social bases

Humanist values

Western values

European democratic principes

Rome

COMMON POLITICAL HERITAGE

Heritage of values

Greek cradle

Ideal of freedom/ peace

Cultural values

COMMON VALUES

Democratic values

Common heritage (political context)

Antiquity

Common/ European civilisation

Western civilisation

Spiritual values

Common values (and principles)

Superior civilisation

COMMON EUROPEAN CIVILISATION

Modern civilisation

Values of European identity

(Fundamental) European values

Christian civilisation

Antique civilisation

Greek cradle

COMMON CULTURAL HERITAGE

Antiquity

Antiquity

Common/ European cultural heritage

Common heritage (cultural context)

COMMON (HISTORICAL) HERITAGE

Rome

Historical ties

Rome

Same heritage

History of Europe

Christianity

Ancient and noble traditions

Historically European

Shared/ Common history

European peoples' history

COMMON EUROPEAN HISTORY

Historically ...

HISTORICAL TIES

Ideas and ideologies in enlargement legitimation

Legitimation strategy for EU enlargement in discourse

✓ EU focuses on its image by creating **positive representations of EUrope** → use of myths, distorted realities, cherry-picked ideological representations.

        e.g.,: Athenian democracy is very different from "modern" democratic values, deletion of the colonizing past, of wars in Europe, and even of cultural differences sometimes

✓ Creation of an **institutionalized, "europeanized", definition of the notion of Europe**: prioritization of positive representations take part to the (re)construction, or even the revision, of the notion of Europe

The EU in crisis (times)

Discourse on Europe-anness used to legitimize EU enlargement → what about more negative contexts?

Second (current) study: how the EU **legitimize** the adequacy of measures
and the need for further EU integration in times of **crises**

Crises = uncertain times
→ perceived as having negative outcomes (Boin, 't Hart, Stern & Sundelius, 2005; Coombs, 2007)
→ may also create opportunities, strengthen institutions, improve democratic governance, see e.g., the "failing forward" effect (Jones, Kelemen and Meunier, 2015, 2021), increase legitimacy and reputation (Olsson, 2014)

Last 20 years: economic, political, security, institutional, and public health crises

→ EU takes decisions, enshrines new laws, and implements crisis measures
→ not always perceived as **effective or democratic** by the public opinion

Crisis communication

Consequences:
→ EU's **legitimacy** jeopardized
→ (nationalist) discourses on **EU *dis*-integration**
→ **Crisis communication** necessary

Communication strategies: reputation/image (defense, sympathy, information, see Verhoeven et al, 2014), strategic/operational (see e.g., Olsson, 2014), creation of empathy (Schoofs et al, 2019), linguistic/metonymic ("Europe" for EU)

Crisis communication and image promotion (Olsson, 2014):

- **Reputation-oriented**: to manage institutional image and legitimacy
    - Focused on the message-sender (i.e. institutions)
    - Presence and competence

- **Resilience-oriented**: to promote renewal and resilience
    - Focused on the message-receiver (i.e. citizens)
    - Empathy, collective identity, emotional support, etc.

Legitimizing decisions in times of crises

RQ: ideas and ideologies used to legitimize decisions/EU integration during the

- Eurozone
- Brexit
- rule-of-law
- covid-19

crises

Main **ideas, narratives, and representations** ("arguments") used to legitimize decisions/the EU during crises (and countering dis-integration)

What are the **ideologies** spread in the EU crisis discourse (e.g., promotion of values, of economic liberalism)

Comparative analysis between crises to trace similarities/differences, learning processes, and connections between types of crisis and arguments

How the EU strategies relate (or not) to tried and tested communication strategies (in search of **best practices** and improvement)

Legitimizing decisions in times of crises

Test corpus

Provides insights into some recurring dynamics and patterns, helpful to draft hypotheses and define the research scope

Drawing from conclusions from first research project:
- Focus on **EU Commission** (Presidents, vice-presidents and commissioners) → Discourse is mostly uniform among EU political institutions (smoothed narrative, few contradictions) and the Commission is the window of the EU
- Focus on **speeches**
- **Restricted time scope** (months correspond to key events)

	Eurozone	Brexit	Rule of law	Covid-19
"Early stage"	May 2010	June 2016	January 2016	March 2020
"Later stage"	July 2014	January 2020	October 2021	November 2021

EU discourse: Legitimation of measures

Eurozone crisis

Measures: more financial mechanisms at EU level (more financial and economic integration), helping countries in difficulty

1) **More coordination in economic and financial governance**

- Fiscal consolidation at EU level, surveillances of imbalances, efficient structures for EMU, full budget capacity for the eurozone, etc.

2) **Solidarity**: Overcoming divisions, remaining united

- Less impacted states must help and stand together with the most impacted ones.
- Only solidarity between the eurozone members can help the EU to solve the crisis

> "…there was also action against sovereign debt of some member states of the euro area. So we have to prepare some kind of defence, not only of Greece, **showing solidarity to Greece**, but also a defence of the stability of the entire euro area." (Barroso, 2010)

EU discourse: Legitimation of measures

Brexit crisis

Measures: avoiding hard Brexit, countering ideas of dis-integration

1) **"Don't leave our attractive EU!"**

- The UK will leave hundreds of international agreements → EU is economically and diplomatically attractive

2) **Shared identity, values, interests, history, and geography**

- The EU integration project is legitimate because peoples and countries share these elements.

3) **Building cooperation for the future** (no "hard Brexit")

- Staying good friends with the UK to tackle global challenges such as climate change and security
- Good relationship will benefit to the EU

"The Union is the framework of our common political future. We are **bound together by history, geography and common interests** and will develop our cooperation on this basis." (Schulz, Tusk, Rutte, & Juncker, 2016).

EU discourse: Legitimation of measures

Rule-of-law crisis

Measures: EU intervention in Poland's national affairs + justifying slow activation of Article 7 TEU

1) **The rule of law is a founding and fundamental EU value**

- EU = community of values and laws

- Rule-of-law protects other values (democracy, human rights, equality, etc.)

> "It is the **foundation of our unity**. It is essential for the protection of **the values, on which our Union is founded**: democracy, freedom, equality and respect for human rights." (Von der Leyen, 2021).

2) **Equality between EU citizens**

- All EU citizens, including Polish, are equal and the EU is responsible for the protection of all its citizens

3) **Constructive dialogue over sanctions**

- Poland is a valued Member State: avoiding Polexit through conciliation → EU = negotiator rather than oppressor

EU discourse: Legitimation of measures

Covid-19

Measures: coordinated measures at the EU level, vaccination

1) **Cooperation and coordination** among EU Member States because global crisis

- Global crisis cannot be dealt with individually

- Crisis without borders cannot be dealt with by (re)establishing borders

2) **Solidarity**: "Vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate!"

- To save lives, to protect oneself and the others

That is why the vaccinations and the hygiene measures are **an act of solidarity**, and they save lives. (Von der Leyen, 2021)

EU crisis communication

EU crisis communication : **both reputation- and resilience-oriented** with some discrepancies among crises

	reputation			**resilience**	
	Justifying unpopular economic measures	Reminding common history and values	Reminding advantages when EU member	Encouraging coordination/coope ration measures	Encouraging solidarity
Eurozone	x			x	x
Brexit		x	x	x	
Rule of law		x		x	
Covid-19				x	x

Ideas and ideologies in EU crisis communication

→ Mix between **identity-related arguments based on the idea of Europe** (e.g., unity, solidarity among European peoples) and **operational arguments** (e.g., economic measures coordinated at the EU level)

→ But operational arguments are **also ideological** (e.g., promotion of economic liberalism)

→ **Reputation- and resilience-oriented arguments in all crises**: legitimation of the EU and its decisions through positive image/reputation and, simultaneously, legitimation through the direct involvement/contribution of the citizens

Conclusions

Legitimation in the EU mostly happens through the construction of an ideational and ideological discourse

➢ **Positive narrative** of Europe-anness (e.g., values as the historical roots of Europe) that complements other pre- and co-existing narratives of Europe in the public space

➢ **Ideas of unity** among European countries/peoples (e.g., single continent, shared values)

➢ Spread of **ideologies** (e.g., economic liberalism, economic and humanitarian solidarity, Europeanism)

➢ **Geopolitical and economic motivations are frequently erased** from EU's public communication

→ Communication strategy to indirectly involve citizens by making them feel concerned as a group with a common belonging

→ But not always working due to lack of European public sphere (Baisnée, 2007), lack of common/European identity, primacy of national identities and public debates, etc.

What's next?

➢ Extension of the corpus to **other EU institutions** (ECB, Council, EP, etc.) and **new mediums of communication** (e.g. tweets)

➢ **Quantifying** the occurrences for each theme to investigate the weight of unity / identity-related arguments and to investigate probability of use of arguments for each crisis

➢ **Best practices** for new communication model (is resilience- and reputation-based communication really adapted to EU institutions?)

➢ **Comparison positive vs. negative contexts (enlargement vs. crises)**: interesting to explore the case of Ukraine where both contexts were at play → representations of Europe (geographical and political values) + crisis discourse of solidarity and unity
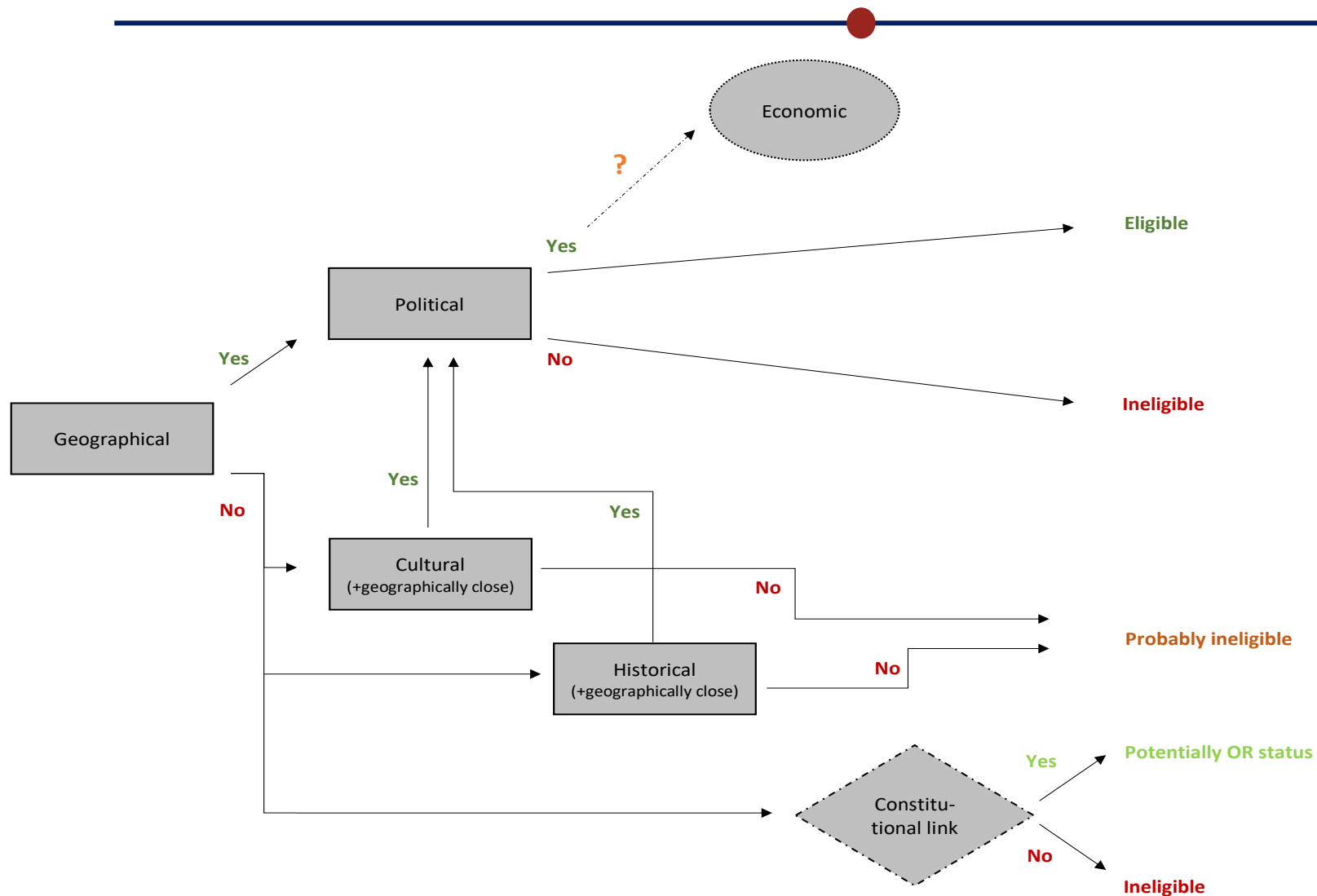
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Legitimizing eligibility: Assessment framework