

## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the ideational leadership of the European Unions' executive institution, the European Commission, by studying its legislative response to the surge in irregular migration to the European Union in 2015 and 2016. In order to assess which form of ideational leadership the Commission expresses, key ideas, rooted in either liberalism or realism, were extracted from the selected documents with the help of an analytical tool, created for a deductive qualitative content analysis based on Watt Boolsens' seven step model. Ten legislative documents proposed by the Commission, deemed relevant to its response to irregular migration, ranging from the period May 2015 to June 2016, were selected. Meaningful entities of these documents were coded and designated a subcategory belonging to key ideas of either liberal or realist nature. These subcategories originate from the main categories: *State & Individuals*, *Humanism & Rights*, *Borders & Security*, and lastly *International actors & Cooperation*. This paper is thereby able to demonstrate which ideas prevail in the Commissions' legislative response to failures in policy during a time of crisis. The results indicate that the Commission expresses ideas predominantly rooted in realism, such as cooperation when deemed beneficial to the EU, call for enhanced border security, and differentiated rights depending on what group of migrants is referenced. Rather than ideas based in liberalism, such as prioritizing the security of migrants, the obligations of the EU to assist migrants, or the general importance of international actors. Although key ideas of liberalism such as on; shared and collective responsibility, as well as safeguards for all, are still very much present in the majority of documents.