

Newsletter 1/2025
7 March 2025



2 + 2 = 4
Der Europa-Podcast

Mit Gerald Knaus und
Philipp Sandmann

Ab dem 25.2.

**Podcast: 10 episodes on migration and the future of Europe – lies,
facts, solutions**

“Do you remember,” he went on, “writing in your diary, ‘Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four’?”

“Yes,” said Winston.

O’Brien held up his left hand, its back towards Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended.

“How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?”

“Four.”

“And if the Party says that it is not four but five – then how many?”

George Orwell, 1984

Dear friends of ESI,

Last week we began a ten-part German language podcast with discussions on the future of Europe. In these first ten episodes of the new podcast $2 + 2 = 4$, we discuss facts, answers and solutions to one of the most controversial topics of our time: migration, borders and asylum, against the backdrop of dramatic developments.

The first two episodes are here: [2 + 2 = 4 Der Europa Podcast](#)

The first season deals with German and Austrian migration policy, the failure of the EU on this issue since 2015, the successes of far-right parties, Orban, and Trump; the “Biden trap”, the “ÖVP trap”, and the failure of migration research since 2015; migration policy in the USA; and moral as well as immoral, successful as well as failed migration agreements.

It is about the future of the UNHCR in the Trump era, and about the path to a humane and sustainable asylum system that can count on majority support.



[ESI discussion on Europe and migration in Düsseldorf and Munich](#)

Elections in Germany – A shock and an opportunity

The general election is behind us. For the first time since 1949, a far-right party has received a fifth of the vote. The AfD is the strongest party everywhere in eastern Germany. In Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and Rhineland-Palatinate, as well as in western Germany as a whole, it is the second strongest.

The pressure on parties in the political centre is therefore increasing, not only in the Bundestag, but also in the federal states. The next German government *must* be successful if Germany is to remain a stable democracy at the heart of Europe; a state that neighbours can rely on and do not have to fear. However, the success of the next government will also be determined by the success or failure of German and European migration policy.

CDU/CSU have won the election; the only option is a coalition with SPD. The parties face the challenge of jointly adopting a migration policy that will reduce irregular migration – without breaking the law. A policy based on realistic promises.

The numbers show the challenge. After the exceptional Covid year of 2020, the number of asylum applications rose from 2021 onward to 244,000 (2022), 352,000 (2023) and 251,000 (2024). This was despite the fact that the 2021 coalition agreement promised to reduce the 2021 figure (191,000). In no year was this achieved.

Development of annual asylum application figures since 2020

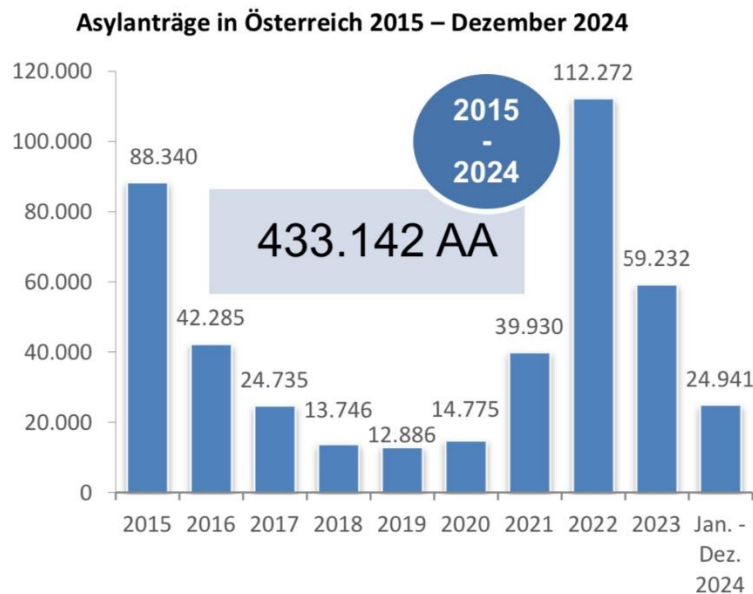
2020	122.170
2021	190.816
2022	244.132
2023	351.915
2024	250.945

[BAMF statistics](#)

Was this due to the policies of the “traffic light coalition”? No.

It was mainly due to the collapse of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2020.

The asylum trend in Austria – with chancellors and interior ministers of the ÖVP – ran exactly parallel to that in Germany. The number of refugees accepted per capita in Austria was even higher than in Germany:



Solutions, not pipe dreams: a proposal from the centre



How can Germany achieve humane migration control? Discussion with the CDU board

Can the democratic centre agree on a successful migration policy? Is it possible to *significantly and quickly reduce* irregular migration and the number of asylum applications? And without an “emergency situation”, without fences around Germany, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights?

Our answer is clear: yes, it is possible.

The focus should be on measures that have already had a demonstrable effect in recent years: **safe third country agreements** (such as the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016), **more safe countries of origin** (such as the Western Balkans in 2015 and Georgia in 2023), and a clear focus on the **deportation of dangerous foreigners who are obliged to leave the country** (such as the Special Task Force for Dangerous Foreigners in Baden-Württemberg).

From 2016 to 2019, the number of asylum applications in Germany fell every year – from 746,000 to 166,000. How did this come about?

2015	476.649
2016	745.545
2017	222.683
2018	185.853
2019	165.938
2020	122.170



ESI meeting with Lars Klingbeil – [discussion in Hanover with Minister-President Weil](#)

NEW: [Migration appeal from the centre](#)

The three most important measures:

1. *A handful of safe third country agreements, negotiated by a coalition of affected EU states before the end of 2026. Turkey is particularly important for Germany (and Austria).*

The right to asylum does not include the freedom to choose the country in which protection is granted. Anyone who applies for asylum at Europe's external borders should be transferred to a safe third country after an admissibility check and be processed there. In the event of a positive outcome, this third country will grant the applicant immediate protection. A comprehensive agreement will be reached to this end. The necessary changes to EU law are a priority for 2025.

2. *More safe countries of origin*

Asylum procedures for persons from countries with a recognition rate of less than five per cent must be accelerated even further. For all countries of origin whose recognition rate lies under five per cent, formal and material regulations must automatically apply to enable accelerated processing.

3. *A focus on the deportation of all deportable dangerous foreigners*

In cooperation with the federal states, the next federal government will record exactly how many convicted criminals and persons posing a threat to public safety who are obliged to leave the country are present in all federal states, and make it a joint priority to deport as many of them as possible within two years. It will regularly inform the public about its progress. The [Special Task Force for Dangerous Foreigners](#) in Baden-Württemberg shows that this is possible – if politicians are serious about it.

Doing what works

The EU-Turkey Statement came into force in March 2016. The impact on irregular migration to the EU and the number of asylum applications in Germany was enormous.

In the 12 months between April 2015 and March 2016, 1 million people entered the EU via the Aegean. In the 12 months following the EU-Turkey Statement, only 28,000 people came across the Aegean. The number of arrivals fell to three per cent of what it was. There was no displacement to other routes in the Mediterranean:

Irregular migration across the Mediterranean to the EU

2015	1,000,000
2016	374,000 (March: EU-Turkey Statement)
2017	185,000
2018	141,000
2019	124,000 (12 percent of 2015)
2020	96,000

In 2016, the “grand coalition” of CDU/CSU and SPD proved that irregular migration can be reduced quickly and significantly. It was also the right policy in moral terms: cooperation with Turkey dramatically reduced the number of deaths in the Aegean.

In May 2024, [a majority of European countries called for a revival of this model](#).

The designation of safe countries of origin in the Western Balkans also led to a rapid decline in asylum applications after 2015:

Applications for asylum in Germany from the six Western Balkan states

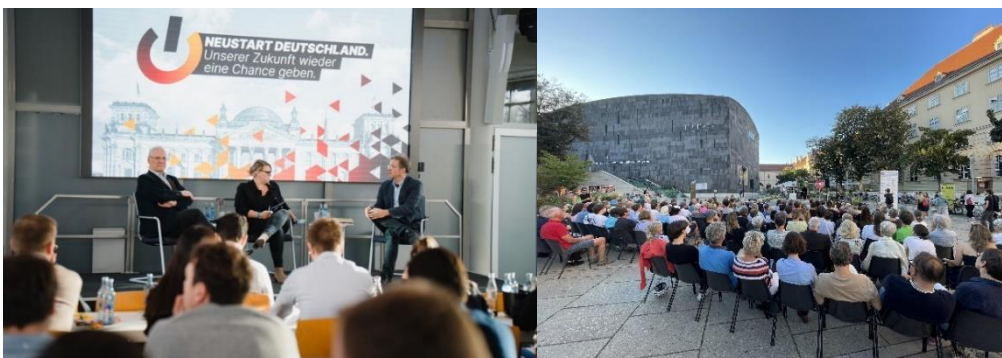
2015:	121,000
	Western Balkan states become safe countries of origin.
2019:	5,000 (20 times less)

We could now build on this. [\(Almost\) hopeless asylum applications in Germany in 2024](#):

Maghreb:	6,550 applications – 180 times protection
Colombia:	3,900 applications – 9 times protection
India, Vietnam:	3,240 applications – 9 times protection

It’s *not* about blocking people from these countries from applying for asylum; those who are persecuted can continue to do so. It’s about ensuring that those who don’t have a chance don’t do it, and thereby easing the burden on the asylum system.

The guiding principle: no illusions, no empty promises, measurable success. The alternative? Continue as before – and the AfD’s next election success is guaranteed.



[Discussion at the Junge Union’s Germany Day, 2024 – Falter discussion in](#)

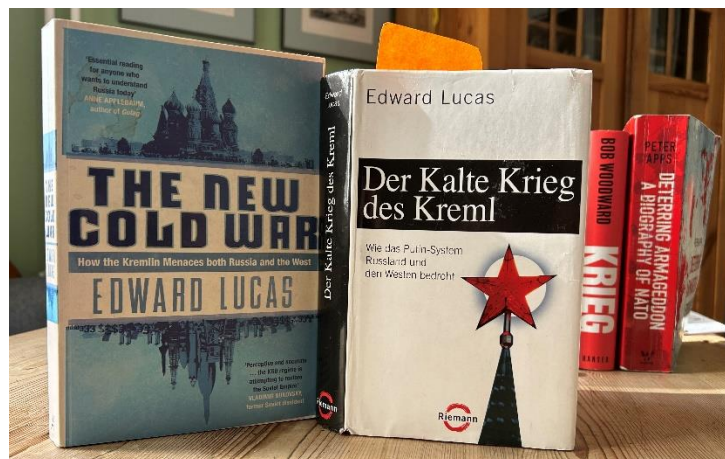
2plus2ist4 book recommendations - 1984, 2008, 2025

In each episode of the podcast, we give a book recommendation. The recommendations so far:



George Orwell – 1984

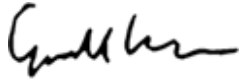
A book that everyone has heard of, that is constantly quoted, and that many people probably read a long time ago (and therefore have forgotten all the details). It is the book for this moment: what happens to our language and our thinking when a political system is based on lies and violence?



Edward Lucas – *The new Cold War: How the Kremlin menaces both Russia and the West*

This book was published in 2008 and Lucas, like few others, recognised early on that an authoritarian and aggressive Moscow posed a threat not only to Russians, but to the world. How could so many people ignore this? Because they didn't want to listen to Putin. Because they ignored the escalating violence in Chechnya. Because they did not want to take the warnings of Russian journalists seriously. And some because they let themselves be bought. It is important to learn from this.

Yours sincerely,



Gerald Knaus

Twitter/X: [@rumeliobserver](https://twitter.com/rumeliobserver)

BlueSky: [@geraldknaus.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/geraldknaus.bsky.social)

“2 + 2= 4” is available on [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/show/2+2=4) and [Apple Podcasts](https://applepodcasts.com/show/2+2=4)

Listen in now!

[The first episode of “2 + 2 = 4” is online here.](#) Gerald Knaus and Philipp Sandmann discuss why migration is still THE key issue in the coalition negotiations – and what solutions Germany needs. Please send questions and suggestions to 2plus2ist4@esiweb.org

[The second episode is online here.](#) We talk about Trump’s lies, how Austria avoided a Chancellor Kickl once more, and the key to the question whether Germany, Austria, and the EU will succeed or fail in controlling migration in the coming years: safe third country agreements.



“2 + 2 is 4” is also on [Instagram](#)

Why this podcast?

“2 + 2 = 4” expresses an ambition: to explain politics in an understandable way based on facts and experience. When misinformation and lies are deliberately spread, we need social debates that are based on knowledge and facts.

We all know too little about everything. We always see the world from different perspectives. Nobody can predict the future. But that doesn’t absolve us, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, from trying to base our actions and thoughts on facts and to counter brazen lies.

In recent weeks, the Trump administration declared, among other things:

- Canada will become the 51st state of the US.
- Greenland must, and will, become part of the US out of security interest.
- There is no freedom of expression in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Germany.
- USAID is a radical left-wing organisation that tried to overthrow governments around the world.
- It is unclear whether Vladimir Putin was an aggressor in 2014.

- Instead, Ukrainian President Zelensky is a dictator.
- Christians are being persecuted in Ukraine.
- Putin wants peace.



This rhetoric is reminiscent of Vladimir Putin’s Russia. And that is dramatic. Because the idea of the rule of law, in which people can only be accused and convicted on the basis of laws and evidence, the ideal of all science, indeed the promise of democracy as a system of government in which majorities can form an opinion about the behaviour of those in power, are all based on the idea that $2 + 2$ is always 4, and that people say this, even if influencers and those in power claim the opposite.

In Orwell’s novel, individuals like the novel’s hero Winston lost all sense of direction. Statistics are falsified, facts suppressed, lies are repeated until people give up questioning them:

“A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this *was* 1984. It must be round about that date, since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty-nine, and he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two.”

In such a world, the truth is what power declares to be the truth, as Winston is told by his torturer. The way out for people in everyday life is *doublethink*:

“Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated.”

In the end, Winston capitulates:

“He gazed up at the enormous face. Forty years it had taken him to learn what kind of smile was hidden beneath the dark moustache. O cruel, needless misunderstanding! O stubborn, self-willed exile from the loving breast! ... But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”



ESI-News: on migration and asylum - 2023-2024

- Athens - ESI briefing on migration at Swiss embassy, 5 October 2023
- Tutzing - ESI at debate on humane borders, 30 October 2023
- Munich - ESI at Instagram - Migration and borders, 31 October 2023
- Vienna - ESI at debate on migration, 9 November 2023
- Brussels - ESI debating migration and asylum policy, 14 November 2023
- Stockholm - ESI meetings on migration and EU enlargement, 14 November 2023
- Dortmund - ESI at discussion on the Mediterranean and migration, 19 November 2023
- Münster - ESI at debate on EU migration policy, 19 November 2023
- Heidelberg - ESI at "Cook Your Future" event on integration, 20 November 2023
- Nuremberg - ESI at migration symposium of Return Counselling Service, 21 November 2023
- Vienna - ESI breakfast briefing on migration with ERSTE Foundation, 23 November 2023
- Vienna - ESI at podium discussion on migration and right-wing populism, 24 November 2023
- Berlin - ESI at Bundestag on human rights protection and the ECHR, 29 November 2023
- Amsterdam - ESI at Duitsland Instituut on migration, Dutch MFA, 8 December 2023
- Berlin - ESI presentation on migration at the South Korean embassy, 13 December 2023
- Rome - ESI at Foreign Press Association: "Migration 2024, annus horribilis?", 15 Dec 2023
- Ravensburg - ESI presentation on Europe's borders and humane control, 24 January 2024
- Lucerne - ESI at the aha Festival: how can migration be depoliticised?, 27 January 2024
- Potsdam - ESI on irregular migration at the German Federal Police, 1 February 2024
- Hamburg - ESI presentation at SPD Hamburg migration working group, 6 February 2024
- Kufstein - Night Talk: ESI presentation on reimagining refugee policies, 15 February 2024
- Berlin - ESI at hearing on safe third countries at the Interior Ministry, 22 February 2024
- Magdeburg - ESI at Intercultural Week: democratic values and migration, 24 February 2024
- Vienna - ESI at Political Academy: managing migration in Europe, 1 March 2024
- Vienna - ESI at Diplomatic Academy: Myths, facts and how we do better, 5 March 2024
- Linz - ESI at "Salon for human rights": rethink Europe's approach to asylum, 6 March 2024
- Athens - ESI on perception and reality: rethinking migration management, 21 March 2024
- Berlin - ESI keynote at "Immigration City" congress: immigration and cities, 11 April 2024

Göttingen - ESI attends "Fritz im Dialog" CDU event on future of migration, 18 April 2024

Düsseldorf - ESI on Europe's borders and the future of democracy, 26 April 2024

Washington D.C. - On resettlement, authoritarianism, transatlantic cooperation, 1 May 2024

Copenhagen - ESI at Migration Conference on future of EU migration policy, 6 May 2024

Kigali - ESI, meetings with president and senior officials, 12 May 2024

Bern - ESI at European Movement Switzerland: Humane borders in Europe, 27 May 2024

Interlaken - ESI at Swiss Economic Forum: Migration futures, 6 June 2024

Berlin - ESI at Bundestag Human Rights Committee: enforcing ECHR, 10 June 2024

Vienna - ESI at debate on the human cost of EU migration policy, 18 June 2024

Frankfurt - ESI on how to manage migration to Europe humanely, 24 June 2024

Dublin - The failure to manage migration and dangers to liberal democracies, 26 June 2024

Hanover - Challenging fear and racism: humane migration policy for Europe, 27 June 2024

Vienna - ESI at Falter Summer Talks: "How do we save democracy?", 6 August 2024

Berlin - ESI at public debate on 'Flight and Peace' in Europe, 10 September 2024

Berlin - ESI at Böll Foundation online discussion on migration debate, 13 September 2024

Duisburg - ESI pulpit church speech on borders and migration, 22 September 2024

Bremen - ESI at CDU debate on migration, 23 September 2024

Bruchsal - ESI on migration - Landkreistag Baden-Württemberg, 21 October 2024

Friedrichshafen - ESI at discussion on EU foreign and migration policy, 22 October 2024

Leuven - ESI on migration fears and populism at Leuven University, 24 October 2024

Antwerp - ESI public debate: "Europe, where do we go from here?", 12 November 2024

Heidelberg - ESI keynote speech at Heidelberg Migration Symposium, 14 November 2024

Weierhammer - ESI on migration at Junge Union Deutschlandtag, 23 November 2024

Berlin - ESI at discussion on migration with former mayor of Berlin, 2 December 2024

Stockholm - ESI meets Swedish leaders on enlargement and migration, 10 December 2024

Karlsruhe - ESI presentation to Judges of Federal Constitutional Court, 11 December 2024

Potsdam - ESI keynote speech on migration and domestic security, 12 December 2024



Discussion on migration in Vienna