To what extent has politics influenced the economic decision of ‘Closing Doors’? – Comparing the UK’s and Germany’s stances on immigration from the A8+2

This paper analyzes the rationales behind the German and the British governments’ decisions to restrict immigration from the New EU Member States in 2004 and 2007. It will be demonstrated that the economic concerns regarding the volume and the potentially negative impacts of mass migration in Germany were highly criticized and to a large extent proven wrong. The same was true for the UK. While the British government took a highly liberal stance on immigration from the EU-8, its policy U-turn in 2007 resulted in a more restrictive immigration policy for the EU-2. While this ‘change of mind’ was based on the UK’s 2004–2006 immigration experience, several studies confirm that the argumentation was, in fact, irrational.

Since both sets of restrictive policies were highly criticized, this paper will examine the governments’ other underlying political reasons. Indeed, it will be argued that the economic arguments used by the governments to apply transitional restrictions in fact disguised their actual political interests and concerns.