A description of the general policy framework contributes to a better understanding of public policymaking processes. For this purpose, policy making processes and how actors behave within them will be looked at in more detail. Policymaking is usually embedded in the context of how interests of actors, parliaments, and governmental negotiations evolve over time. Although this study – as will be elaborated in full detail at a later stage – focuses mainly on the discourses and language of such policy processes, the general framework of the field of policymaking and the relation between policy frames and actors will be demonstrated in this chapter. It will become clear what role language, or ‘lingual constructs’, have in this study. The chapter will discuss focal concepts such as discourses, frames, and actors, and will describe the approach taken in the subsequent case analysis.

**Policymaking and policy frames**

Strategies of political power do not revolve solely around the exercise of ‘hard power’ – that is, the ability to translate material resources into bargaining leverage and coercive threats. These strategies also include the use of ‘soft power’, such as persuasion, the management of policy perceptions, and the establishment of a new framework of debate (Nye, 1990a; 1990b; 2004), embodied in language. The use of such policy frames is a ‘soft power’ strategy that actors deploy in policymaking processes. A *policy frame* refers to a ‘schemata of interpretation’ (Goffman, 1974), or a perspective on a policy situation that encapsulates a definition of a problem or a specific course of action that in the end will deliver desired or preferred solutions.
When adopted by policymakers within a policy domain, a policy frame influences policymaking characteristics: Which problems will be addressed? Which actors will be deemed relevant to participate? Which policy instruments are most appropriate? From this perspective, changes in policy directions over time may be viewed as the product of competition between the actor’s construction and mobilisation of different policy frames. Actors construct and mobilise policy frames while engaging in three activities considered crucial to effecting policy change: coalition building, institutional manipulation, and ideational alignment (e.g., Hajer and Laws, 2006). In relation to coalitions, frames offer a ‘focal point’ for the construction and maintenance of coalitions in complex and fragmented policy processes. Frames prove helpful to actors in aligning new policy initiatives with broader societal themes and values.

In developing a deconstruction of policies for immigration control, and more specifically policies for irregular migration, two distinct bodies of literature will be drawn upon, which are two of the essential ‘building blocks’ of politics: actors and ideas (Heclo, 1993). The first body of literature consists of actor-based models of the policymaking process. These models characterise modern politics by the presence of various policy networks, epistemic communities, and/or advocacy coalitions operating within sector-specific policy domains. Such group formations represent an effective and practical vehicle for the pursuit of interests within complex and fragmented political systems; their durability and effectiveness often depend upon the shared viewpoints and beliefs held by group members.

Second, and most crucial for this study, an ideas-based literature will be employed to analyse the role of cognitive and normative factors in justifying and legitimising policy choices. Goldstein (1993), Hall (1989), and Sikkink (1991) argue that policymaking occurs within an ideational framework consisting of several layers of ideas ranging from specific policy ideas to prevailing public sentiments. They claim that coherence amongst different layers of ideas usually characterise policy domains. From this perspective, policy change must be viewed in light of how new proposals are made to ‘fit’ coherently within a given ideational framework. In other words, new ideas must nest within these layers. Otherwise actors will need to attempt realignment in order to make new proposals appear ‘legitimate’ and ‘right’.

Policy domains and policy processes
Policy frame mobilisation takes place within the context of a policy domain. A policy domain refers to a social space in which actors gather to participate in policy deliberation. Within this social space they intend