

## The Securitisation of Migration

This chapter will analyse the securitisation of migration by the European Union (EU). Whereas relevant literature has specified that the securitisation of the issue of migration in the EU has begun since the establishment of the Schengen Area, this work focuses on the policy actions developed during and after the outburst of the recent refugee crisis in 2015. The chapter will analyse the securitisation theory, elaborated by the Copenhagen and the Paris Schools of security studies, and the principle that an issue is defined as a security threat either by speech acts or by practices. It will, then, examine the policy choices made by the EU institutions for the control of migration flows. Specifically, it assesses EU policy initiatives on external border controls such as the reinforcement of the Frontex Agency, the initiation of the EU naval mission Operation Sophia, the cooperation of the EU with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the initiation of the EU–Turkey Deal.

*Keywords:* migration, security, securitisation, Frontex, CSDP maritime operations

### Acronyms

AFSJ	Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
EUROSUR	European Border Surveillance System
ISIS	Islamic State
MARCOM	Maritime Command
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
RABITs	Rapid Response Teams

### Introduction

During the recent so-called European migration and refugee crisis, the Syrian conflict, the Libyan civil war, the elusive situation in the Middle East and Afghanistan generated an unprecedented influx of irregular migrants. In 2015, the EU registered 1.35 million asylum applications, a momentous double increase compared with 627 thousand in 2014, while most of the migrants originated from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, stricken by outbursts of war and conflicts (Frontex 2016). The increased number of irregular migrants and, at the same time, the terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Germany and the U.K. in 2015–2017 called the attention to the interrelation of terrorism and security threats with

irregular migration (SCHMID 2016). The security–migration nexus and the consideration of migration as a security issue has been widely studied (HUYSMANS 2000; GEDDES 2003; FAIST 2004: 3; LÉONARD 2010; ESTEVENS 2018).<sup>1</sup>

Since the establishment of the Schengen Area in the 1990s, migration has been correlated with security threats in the EU (BROCHMANN 1999). Thus, the Schengen Agreement (1985) was supplemented by the Dublin Convention (1990) and additional measures aiming at creating a ‘fence’ against irregular flows or as it is usually mentioned the ‘Fortress Europe’ (BIGO 2004). The preventive policies against irregular migration have been based on three interrelated policy areas: the Common European Asylum System (CEAS); the external agreements on re-admission of non-eligible for entry migrants and the management of migration flows and, finally, the external border controls (ASDERAKI–MARKOZANI 2016). The process of securitisation has been accentuated since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the USA and the terrorist bombings in Madrid (2004) and in London (2005). Moreover, the threats of the so-called “Islamic State” (ISIS) augmented the feelings of insecurity in Europe but also pointed up the concomitance of the growing threat of terrorism with irregular migrants. European policy makers accentuated the link between migration and internal security (BOSWELL 2007; MORENO-LAX 2018). European decision-makers had long ago attempted the securitisation of irregular migration, producing a preventive and multi-dimensional policy which included a rather complex and strict asylum system, close cooperation with third countries on the management of migration flows and control of irregular cross-border crossings (HUYSMANS 2000). Nevertheless, after the outbreak of the 2015 refugee crisis, the EU intensified the securitisation, implementing aggressive means to fight the problem of irregular migration (CECCORULLI 2019; ASDERAKI–MARKOZANI 2021). Therefore, the EU has oriented its migration policy to a security strategy, passing a part of the migration agenda from the policy Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

### **Background: Theory**

On the theoretical level, the concept of the securitisation of migration was initially developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, establishing the Copenhagen School of security studies (BUZAN 1991; WÆVER et al. 1993; WÆVER 1995; BUZAN et al. 1998; WÆVER 2000). According to this school, the concept of security is wider, including, apart from military threats, political, economic, societal, environmental and religious ones (BUZAN et al. 1998). Conceptualising security as a procedure of social construction, they explained that a security threat is defined as such through speech and discourse: “Security is the speech act where a securitizing actor designates a threat to a specified referent object and declares an existential threat implying a right to use extraordinary means to fence it off” (WÆVER

<sup>1</sup> This work is based on ASDERAKI–MARKOZANI 2021: 179–198.

2000: 251). In this context, an issue is politically delineated as a security threat by the use of respective language publicly which legitimates extraordinary measures (WÆVER 2000). No subject can be regarded as a security threat a priori but, instead, it is constructed as such only if it is “written and talked into existence” (HUYSMANS 2006: 7). Political actors are those who perform “the securitizing act attempts to convince” (WÆVER 2000; BUZAN et al. 1998: 41). As Neal suggested the concept of securitisation consists of “a commonly used way to understand how ‘security’ is invoked to legitimize contentious legislation, policies or practices that would otherwise not have been deemed legitimate” (NEAL 2009: 335).

The process of securitisation includes three complementary but compulsory stages which need to be fulfilled so that securitisation can be completed (BUZAN et al. 1998: 6):

- a) the definition by speech of a security threat by a public actor
- b) the acceptance of the issue as a threat by the audience which entails the detachment of the established norms and
- c) the implementation of extraordinary measures against the perceived threat once they are legitimised

Political actors in Europe, such as politicians and institutions regarded migration as a cultural nuisance, an economic risk and a threat to society’s safety and survival from the 1990s onwards (HUYSMANS 2000). The use of phrases in public speech such as “managing immigration effectively means addressing also different issues linked to the security of our societies. [...] This requires fighting illegal immigration and criminal activities related to it...” (European Commission 2008: 3), correlate migration with cross-border crimes and other security threats and therefore, securitise EU policy activities (SPERLING–WEBBER 2019). This has been apparent in the EU policy making after the establishment of the Schengen Area which marked that “the abolition of internal border controls cannot come at the expense of security” (European Commission 2018). The promotion of security in relation with migration by the relative actors can justify the formation of a policy, based on security means. EU institutions, European leaders and policy makers are identified as the ones who perform “the securitizing act attempts to convince” (WÆVER 2000; BUZAN et al. 1998: 41) and take the initiative on securitising policy acts. Wæver regarded security as a valuable instrument for EU institutions: “Security is invoked in a sense that can be interpreted as a call to defend a not-yet-existing social order” (WÆVER 1995: 74).

In addition to the securitisation through speech, the correlation of migration with security issues can be attained through practices of routines, as the Paris School and Didier Bigo elaborated. Relative administrative and bureaucratic routines and connections through institutional networks of agents can contribute to the securitisation of a policy. In case of the establishment of a relation, during the implementation of professional tasks and routines, between agents of a security field with professionals of another field, such as migration, can result in the securitisation of practices of the non-security field (BALZACQ 2011). As a result, securitisation can be the outcome of efficiency of policy practices, mimesis or cloning (SPERLING–WEBBER 2019). These practices include “... population

profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation, category creation, proactive preparation, and what may be termed a specific habitus of the ‘security professional’ with its ethos of secrecy and concern for the management of fear or unease” (BIGO 2002: 65–66). In the context of migration policy, examples of such practices include the use of the relevant technology and databases for profiling and screening migrants, such as the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) (LAVENEX 2001; BIGO 2002; HUYSMANS 2000; BOSWELL 2007; CECCORULLI 2019).

### **Core content: EU policy practices**

On the policy level, to deal with the new extensive challenges of the refugee crisis, the EU militarised its policy by reinforcing Frontex and transformed it into the official European Border and Guard Agency. In addition, European decision-makers issued specialised military naval missions for the protection of external borders in the Mediterranean.

### **Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency)**

As Bigo (2002) explained on the securitisation through practices, the role of Frontex is the control and surveillance of external borders including the screening, monitoring, identifying and fingerprinting of migrants. Until 2016, the role of Frontex was supportive and auxiliary, and intended to increase the efficiency of coordinated border controls. The main objective of the Agency has been the administrative and operational cooperation between Member States in order to implement an Integrated Management System of proper supervision, and the development of the specialised joint sea operations for the control and protection of the EU’s external borders (Council of the European Union 2004). The Agency also provides expert support on training and risk analysis and contributes to the confrontation of operational emergency problems, such as a mass influx of migrants, through its Rapid Response Teams (RABITs) (European Parliament and Council 2007). Nonetheless, in 2016 after the outburst of the crisis on the EU’s external borders in the Mediterranean, the EU reinforced Frontex with the right to intervene in emergency circumstances which jeopardise the integrity and security of the Schengen Area, aggrandising the Agency’s autonomy (European Parliament and Council 2016: Article 19). Reflecting the extraordinary measures which are legitimised under the securitisation process, the regulation states that: “In cases where there is a specific and disproportionate challenge at the external borders, the Agency should, at the request of a Member State or on its own initiative, organise and coordinate rapid border interventions and deploy both European Border and Coast Guard teams from a rapid reaction pool and technical equipment” (European Parliament and Council 2016: Article 24). Moreover, the new Regulation doubled the number of Frontex’s guards (European Commission 2016b).

On the operational level, Frontex has coordinated the joint sea operations “Triton” in the Central Mediterranean, “Poseidon” in the Eastern Mediterranean, “Minerva” and “Indalo” in the Western Mediterranean for the control of maritime borders and the rescue of migrants in the sea (European Commission 2015b). The joint operation Triton was expanded and a number of additional experts, vessels and aircraft were brought in, while, in 2018, it was re-launched under the new name of Operation Themis (Frontex 2020). Besides, Frontex has normalised the use of firearms as a means of self-defence of Frontex guards (LEGGIERI 2016). Frontex was further strengthened in 2019 through an amendment to its regulation which granted the agency even more autonomy on acquiring its own permanent personnel and, as a result, to stop depending on the Member States’ human resources (European Parliament and Council 2019). The continuous development of Frontex’s power and the militarisation of external border controls reveal the turn of the EU towards the deployment of a more offensive strategy against irregular migration (MORENO-LAX 2018).

### **EUNAVFOR MED and NATO**

The consolidation and empowerment of Frontex has not been the sole indication of the militarisation of migration policy. The Action Plan of 10 points, launched by the Commission in 2015 and particularly the proposal for the unfolding of the military operation in the Mediterranean for the demolition of smugglers’ activity demonstrated that the actions of the Task Force Mediterranean incorporated the transfer of the means for controlling irregular migration from the institutional framework of Justice and Home Affairs to the CSDP, and the binding of the European Agenda of Migration with the European Agenda on Security (European Commission 2015a). The most significant aspect of the 10-point proposal of the Commission has been the establishment of an operation of the European marine body EUNAVFOR, similar to the Operation Atalanta for locating and destroying the boats used by smugglers. The Council of April 2015 adopted all of the Commission’s proposals and, in May 2015, the Decision of the Council (Council of the European Union 2015) launched the military initiative of the EU Naval Force body, EUNAVFOR Mediterranean “Operation Sophia”. The objective of the operation has been the interruption of the ongoing tragedies in the Central Mediterranean, and the disruption of the smugglers’ operation model through the strengthening of the EU’s maritime presence. The Council and the High Representative are responsible for the political control of the operation and the Commission has been delegated with the strategic guidance (Council of the European Union 2015: Article 1). The CSDP missions and operations in the Mediterranean, such as the Operation EUNAVOR Med Sophia and the EUBAM Libya were renewed after the Malta Declaration of 3 February 2017 (European Council 2017a).

Whereas Operation Sophia has been placed in the Central Mediterranean, in the Eastern Mediterranean and on the Greek–Turkish borders, the EU has cooperated with NATO. Since February 2015, the NATO maritime force has contributed to the control of irregular migration flows from the Turkish coasts to the Greek Islands. NATO fleets agreed

to support the Greek and Turkish authorities and Frontex on the surveillance of migrant crossings. NATO's surveillance activities were incorporated into the creation of a general framework with direct links between Maritime Command (MARCOM) and Frontex (NATO 2016a). The NATO operation has been normalised under the name Operation Sea Guard (NATO 2016b). Once more, the endorsement of NATO's support and its military fleet underscore the established concept of irregular migration as a security threat. Besides, the fight against irregular migration was also incorporated in the announcement for the activation and formation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (an institutional instrument, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty [Article 42(6) TEU and 46 TEU and Protocol 10]) and the deployment of joined security operations among the participating Member States. As the Conclusions of the European Council stated, PESCO has included the creation of "...a European Defence Fund, composed of a research window and a capability window, and is looking forward to its swift operationalisation [...] including by cross border cooperation" in which the goal has been "...to tackle migration and to protect its external borders" (European Council 2017b).

### **The EU–Turkey Deal**

For the EU, the refugee crisis underscored the significance of Turkey and the interdependence between the neighbouring actors in managing regional migration flows. Recognising the inability of the EU asylum system to manage the vast amount of the asylum seekers, the EU relied on its efforts with Turkey. After a special negotiating meeting of the Heads of EU States with Turkey, the first EU–Turkey Statement was adopted in November 2015, aiming at coordinating their actions for the management of the refugee crisis through a Joint Action Plan (European Council 2015). Following the closure of the Balkan route (FYROM, Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary), the EU and Turkey concluded a reinforced deal, through the Statement of the EU Heads of State and Government adopted on 18 March 2016 (European Council 2016a). According to the Statement, Greece and Turkey have agreed "to return all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands with the costs covered by the EU; to resettle, for every Syrian readmitted by Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian from Turkey to the EU Member States, within the framework of the existing commitments" (European Council 2016a). In this framework, readmission agreements have been re-activated or signed with the EU, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. Greece and Turkey have enabled the readmission process with the direct return of irregular migrants from the Greek Islands to Turkey (European Council 2016b). However, the readmission results between Greece and Turkey have been poor.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In 2017, only 1,896 irregular migrants were sent back to Turkey: 1,307 based on the EU–Turkey Statement and 589 returns based on the bilateral readmission agreement between Greece and Turkey (European Commission 2017).



In the framework of the EU–Turkey ‘deal’, Turkey in 2017 received almost €3 billion for the humanitarian and development needs of refugees and the creation of a refugee reception facility in Turkey through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (European Commission 2017a). Turkey has received an additional assistance of €3 billion in 2018 under the condition that the authorities implement all of the EU requirements for the proper allocation of refugees. The establishment of reception centres in third countries for the detainment of asylum seekers is a central strategic measure of the externalisation of migration (LAVENEX 2006). The European Commission monitors the implementation of the EU–Turkey Joint Plan and reports to the Member States (European Commission 2016a) through a Steering Committee consisting of one representative per Member State and two representatives from the Commission (Council of the European Union 2016). The impact of security concerns has also been apparent to the governance of external cooperation with Turkey. Apart from the financial assistance for the needs of refugees, Turkey has received almost €20 million for the improvement of the capacity of the Turkish Coast Guard to carry out search and rescue operations and €40 million through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for the support of the Border Surveillance Capacity at the Eastern Borders of Turkey (European Commission 2017b). In Gaziantep (Southern Turkey), the EU has established an EU office to coordinate its initiatives in the region, including the Rapid Reaction Mechanism for cross border operations for the support to the Syrian borders.

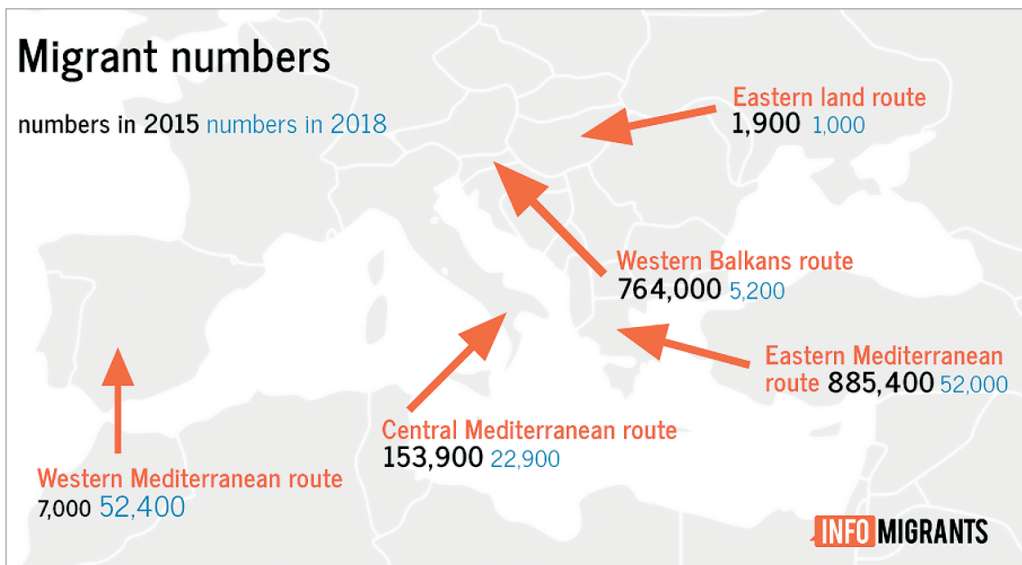


Figure 1: Migrant routes to Europe

Source: MACGREGOR 2019

## **Conclusions**

Considering all, the EU policy on irregular migration has been based on the perception of migration as a security menace. This perception has led the EU to normalise the use of offensive and military means to tackle migration flows. Besides, the European Council included in its New Strategic Agenda for the EU 2019–2024 as a priority to “defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens and protect them against existing and emerging threats” which include “effective control of the external borders, fighting illegal migration and human trafficking through better cooperation with countries of origin and transit, agreeing on effective asylum policy” (European Council 2019). Apart from that, the recent Commission proposals in the framework of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum in September 2020 include a reinforcement of border controls since it requires the establishment of pre-border screenings to the irregular migrants. These screenings are expected to be performed by the frontline Member States before the migrants enter the EU (European Commission 2020).



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