From Narratives to Perceptions in the Securitisation of the Migratory Crisis in Europe

https://www.e-ir.info/2018/09/03/from-narratives-to-perceptions-in-the-securitisation-of-the-migratory-crisis-in-europe/

SUSANA FERREIRA, SEP 3 2018

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The management of migration in the Mediterranean is one of the main challenges that the European Union (EU) currently faces. The intense migratory flows registered since the end of 2013 that peaked in 2015, with over 1.8 million border crossing detections around the EU (Frontex 2017, 19), have put to test the mechanisms of the Union's immigration, border and asylum policies and its capacity to deal with a humanitarian crisis. The current migratory crisis has revealed the EU's weaknesses regarding the management of migratory flows and the deficiencies of its legal framework on migration, borders and asylum. Furthermore, the EU's actions have been criticised by many (namely civil society organisations and academics) for its focus on security measures, specifically in terms of border management, claiming that the securitisation of migrations is not the answer to the crisis.

The adoption of a set of emergency actions, extraordinary measures that go beyond ordinary politics, and the emphasis on a dialectic between migration and security on political narratives, aims to legitimise the securitisation practices adopted during the current migratory crisis. Hence, in this chapter I focus on the practices and narratives of the EU's political leaders to address the securitisation of migrations during the migratory crisis. I argue that a securitisation of migrations in the EU is taking place during this period (from 2013 to date), through the implementation of emergency actions by the EU and the adoption of securitarian narratives by European political leaders to support these actions.

For a better assessment of the securitisation process, this chapter is organized as follows: firstly, I introduce the academic debate on the securitisation of migrations in the EU, followed by an analysis of the EU's main strategic documents to assess how migrations are presented as a security threat to the EU; afterwards, I address the emergency actions adopted during the current migratory crisis, as well as the discourses of political leaders on migration, and the impact they had on public perceptions and opinions; and, lastly, I present some overall conclusions.

The Securitisation of Migrations

Any matter dealt with at a higher level, often the state, is considered as politicisation. When that subject is regarded as urgent it can lead to securitisation. Securitisation, more than an extreme version of politicisation, goes beyond it, since a special treatment is given to the subject. Thus, there is securitisation only when there is a legitimate existential threat that legitimises the breaking of rules to perform emergency actions (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998, 24–25).

For the Copenhagen School, the speech that presents an object as an existential threat does not create securitisation on its own; it is rather a securitising move. Acceptance by the audience is necessary so that the issue in question is dealt with as a securitised object (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998). Thus, the securitising process is only complete when there is an acceptance by the audience. Nevertheless, Balzacq (2011, 22) goes beyond the focus on

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the speech acts of the Copenhagen School, instead emphasising the role of practices; the security acts. In this sense, an approach that combines both practices (acts) and narratives (speech acts) is a more comprehensive one to analyse the process of securitisation of migrations in the EU.

Over the last two decades, the academic debate on the securitisation of immigration has been a very rich one. This link between international migrations and security has a constructivist matrix at its basis, arising from the creation of a nexus of threats, where different actors share their fears in the creation of a 'dangerous society' (Bigo 2002).

When analysing the migration-security link, we are not only focusing on state security, but on the security of society as a whole and even the security of the various groups that compose it. Immigration can be perceived as a threat to a state's sovereignty, but also as a threat to the freedom of society. In the first case, we are dealing with the immigration problem as political security, whereas in the second, we are under societal security.

Within the framework of societal security, immigration threatens societal identity. Thus, the securitisation of immigration takes place through the securitisation of identity, i.e., 'the European supranational identity is defended against a cultural (or demographic) invasion of other identities' (Brancante and Reis 2009, 82).

Jeff Huysmans argues that the securitisation of immigration in Europe is intertwined with the regional integration process (Brancante and Reis 2009, 83). On the one side, this securitisation of immigration is triggered by welfare chauvinism, which, according to the author, is 'a strategy of introducing cultural identity criteria in an area in which belonging is determined on the basis of social policy criteria, such as health, age, disability and employment' (Huysmans 2000, 768). It translates into an economic fear that immigrants might overload the welfare system and jeopardise the internal market. On the other side, immigration may also be perceived as a menace to cultural homogeneity. Within the logic of societal security of the Copenhagen School, Huysmans (2000) suggests that an identity is created in opposition to the identities that surround it, which may lead to the creation of a supranational European identity.

Critics of the societal security concept, Bigo (2002) and Adamson (2006) claim that there is a securitisation of migration to fight transnational crime, such as terrorism and organised crime, within the realm of national security. Bigo (2002, 63) claims that this security prism to analyse migrations 'is the result of the creation of a continuum of threats and general unease in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs in the process of making a risk and dangerous society'. In this sense, Bigo's sociological approach focuses on the role of security agencies, which he calls professional 'managers of unease', in the securitisation of migration, by their own practices. These professionals not only have to face the threat, but they have the power to determine what is or what is not a threat (Bigo 2002, 74).

Nevertheless, the rise of terrorism in the security agenda led to the increasing relation between terrorism and migration and the adoption of a human rights-centred perspective, focusing on the human security of individuals. In this sense, authors such as Bhabha (2005) claim that anti-immigrant policies do not work in practice and they should rather be framed within existing human rights law. Thus, states should rethink their policies and protect their borders while safeguarding immigrants' human rights.

Irregular migrations are often conceived as an element of insecurity, as the illicit entrance of migrants might present a direct or immediate challenge to state security (Requena 2015, 61). Nevertheless, the requirements for legal entrance are defined by national immigration policies. Therefore, the political power is the one entitled to declare the entrance of others as regular or irregular. Thus, in a situation of irregularity the immigrant becomes the enemy of the politician (Bigo 2002, 6), and is therefore considered a threat. Moreover, irregular migrations bring along a series of threats to immigrants' human security.

Migrations as a Security Threat to the EU

The definition of security priorities is essential for policy design. Accordingly, an analysis of the EU's main strategic documents allows us to understand the connection between security and migrations in the EU's lexicon, which later

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translates into its policy making.

In this sense, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the EU has adopted different security strategies in order to adapt to the new realities, taking into account the threats arising at that moment in time. The 2003*European Security Strategy* identifies five key threats to European security: terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime (European Council 2003). Under the threat of organised crime, it briefly addresses irregular migrations, along with drugs and arms trafficking, as part of the external dimension of organised crime. Furthermore, it focuses on the Mediterranean region as a neighbouring unstable area, which requires the Union's continued engagement. In this sense, the document reflects post-9/11 thinking, focusing on the threat of terrorism and transnational organised crime. Yet, it already reflects the Union's concern over irregular migrations and stability in the Mediterranean area.

Given the changes the EU suffered in the first decade of the twenty-first century, such as the 2004 enlargement and the beginning of the economic crisis in 2007, as well as the international system, and within the framework of the Stockholm programme, the European Council adopted in 2010 an *Internal Security Strategy* for the EU, which aimed to address the new challenges. The strategy defines a 'new' set of common threats to internal security, which are: terrorism, organised crime, cyber-crime, cross-border crime, violence itself, and natural and man-made disasters. Some of these threats had already been outlined by the 2003 European Security Strategy – terrorism and organised crime – yet, new ones emerge as part of the new international order (Council of the European Union 2010).

Finally, in 2015, the Union adopted the *European Agenda on Security*, at a time that the EU faced a migratory crisis. This new agenda aims to be a 'shared agenda' between the Union and its Member States in the creation of an area of internal security. The EU outlines three common threats to its internal security: terrorism, organised crime, and cybercrime. Furthermore, the document stresses the need to effectively implement border management to prevent cross-border crime and terrorism (European Commission 2015c, 6), highlighting the link between border management, migrations and security.

These three documents – the *European Security Strategy*, the *Internal Security Strategy* and the *European Agenda on Security* – define the EU's key priorities in terms of internal security, always taking into account the specific moment in which they are inserted. Still, the connection between security and migrations is clear, depicting irregular migrations as a threat to security and emphasising the role of border management in the management of migrations.

In this sense, the EU mainly focuses on irregular migrations as a threat to its internal security, despite the fact that it only represents a small part of the total migrations to the European territory. Furthermore, the repeated use of the word 'illegal' in the EU's jargon to refer to these flows emphasises this representation of a threat.

Furthermore, the current migratory crisis reiterated the connection with terrorism, previously established with 9/11. Fears that jihadist terrorists could enter the EU's territory using migratory routes were confirmed after the Paris attacks on November 2015, since '[t]wo of the terrorists involved had previously irregularly entered via Leros and had been registered by the Greek authorities, presenting fraudulent Syrian documents in order to speed up their registration process' (Frontex 2016, 12).

To sum up, within the EU, migrations are mainly conceived as a threat to societal and internal security, particularly irregular migrations. Thus, this approach translates into the policy design in the field of migrations.

On the Adoption of Emergency Actions to Face the Migratory Crisis

The endorsement of a set of emergency actions is a fundamental axis in the securitisation process (Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde 1998, 24–25), as previously highlighted. Therefore, it is of great importance to analyse the urgent measures adopted to deal with the migratory crisis, in order to assess the securitisation of migrations.

The sinking of a vessel carrying over 500 refugees in Lampedusa (Italy) in October 2013 led to the implementation of a Task Force for the Mediterranean, which proposed guidelines and measures to better address migratory flows in

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this area and prevent deaths at sea (Council of the European Union 2013). The Task Force identified five main areas of action that should be assessed in the following months: strengthening cooperation with third countries; regional protection, resettlement and reinforced legal avenues to Europe; fight against trafficking, smuggling and organised crime; reinforcing border surveillance in order to provide an up-to-date maritime situational picture and the protection and saving of lives of migrants in the Mediterranean; assistance and solidarity with Member States dealing with high migratory pressure. However, despite the Commission's commitment to implement the actions proposed, the ones taken were not enough to prevent the worsening of the crisis and the increasing loss of lives at sea.

The increasing migratory pressure in the Mediterranean since the end of 2013 became again an increasingly pressing issue on the European agenda in April 2015, when a boat sank near the shores of Lampedusa killing near 300 people (Kington, 2013). This humanitarian tragedy left the EU in a crisis mode (Ferreira 2016, 5). The following day, on 20 April, the European Commission presented a ten-point action plan on migration, which defined immediate actions to be taken in response to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean (European Commission 2015e). Among the measures established, the most controversial one was the proposal of a military action to tackle smuggling in the Mediterranean. Finally, in May 2015 the European Commission presented its European Agenda on Migration (European Commission 2015f), setting concrete and immediate actions to tackle the crisis and looking forward in terms of a strategy to better manage migrations.

The European Agenda on Migration aims to give a comprehensive framework to the management of migrations in the EU, combining both internal (immigration, asylum and borders) and external policies (Common Security and Defence Policy), and taking into account the shared responsibility between EU Member States and also countries of transit and origin.

The plan put forward a set of specific measures at two different levels: the first level focuses on the urgent actions needed to respond to the human tragedy lived in the Mediterranean; and the second level identifies the four main pillars to better manage migrations (European Commission 2015f, 3–6). Among the urgent actions, a very controversial issue has been the adoption of a relocation and resettlement scheme (European Commission 2015f, 4), since home affairs and interior ministers could not reach an agreement on the quota of refugees to be relocated and resettled across the EU, given the divergences and controversies between frontline Member States and central and northern Member States. Member States finally reached a consensus in September 2015 to relocate a total of 160,000 people (see Council Decisions of 14 September and 22 September 2015). However, the relocation process has been very slow and thus has fallen very far behind the numbers agreed. According to the European Commission's ninth progress report on the EU's emergency relocation and resettlement schemes, on 8 February 2017 a total of 11,966 refugees had been relocated (8,766 from Greece and 3,200 from Italy) and 13,968 people in need of international protection had been resettled in the EU's Member States. According to the same report, 'Sweden, the United Kingdom, Finland and Netherlands as well as associated countries Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Iceland have already fulfilled their pledges' (European Commission 2017a).

Furthermore, the plan proposes, among other urgent measures: a funding package for Frontex's missions Triton and Poseidon; the implementation of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission on smuggling migrants; a pilot multi-purpose centre established in Niger by the end of 2015; and a 'hotspot' approach to work on the ground with frontline Member States to identify and register incoming migrants (European Commission 2015f, 3–6). However, so far the EU has not been able to deliver the necessary results. In this sense, according to a report of the European Council of Refugees and Exiles, the 'hotspots have certainly not helped in relieving the pressure from Italy and Greece as was their stated objective: instead, they have led to an increase in the number of asylum applicants waiting in Italy and Greece, consolidating the challenges and shortcomings already inherent in the Dublin system' (European Council for Refugees and Exile 2016, 7). Regarding the adoption of the CSDP operation – EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, although this operation has helped to reduce the migratory flow by nine percent (compared to the previous years) in the Central Mediterranean route, it has led to a change in routes and a high increase in the Eastern Mediterranean route (Council of the European Union 2016).

Nevertheless, given the migratory pressure that Greece was being subjected to by the beginning of 2016 due to the closing of borders along the Balkan route, the EU-Turkey Agreement was signed in March 2016. This agreement

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takes a step further in the externalisation of the EU's borders, making Turkey partly responsible for the management of the EU's eastern border, while creating a new buffer State. The agreement aims to address the overflowing arrival of migrants from Turkey to Greece through the return of any new irregular migrant that arrives in Greece to Turkey. Nevertheless, it raises several questions regarding its legality, as it violates EU law on issues such as detention and the right to appeal (Collett 2016), and even its operationalisation. On the one hand, this agreement denies potential refugees the possibility to request international protection in the EU. On the other hand the mass returns of refugees and migrants to Turkey, despite the establishment of a resettlement scheme, violates international and European law protecting refugees and asylum seekers, namely the principle of non-refoulement. Moreover, it is still questionable if Turkey may be considered a 'safe third country' for refugees or whether Turkey can ensure access to effective asylum procedures for those in need of international protection (Brooks 2016; de Marcilly 2016). Furthermore, this agreement also shows the EU's connivance with totalitarian regimes in order to achieve its goals.

Discourses on Migration

Discourses on immigration create different perceptions within the general public, often supported by the media coverage of these issues. Sometimes the person who presents the discourse is more important than the speech itself. As Balzacq (2005, 172) put it, the discursive techniques used by agents allow '(…) the securitising actor to induce or increase the [public] mind's adherence to the thesis presented to its assent'. Various studies have focused on the different construction of discourses on immigration issues in Europe (see Buonfino 2004; Triandafyllidou 2000). Therefore, I do not aim to do a thorough analysis of European leaders' political discourses on immigration and security, rather to deconstruct the main ideas portrayed by these speeches in this specific moment in time.

Research has shown that there are two main opposite axes on discourses on migrations (Gropas 2015; Triandafyllidou 2012, 389). On the one hand, there is a humanitarian and solidarity approach. In these discourses, the emphasis is placed on equal treatment for immigrants and their contribution to host societies. On the other hand, there are the discriminatory discourses, which emphasise a nationalistic rationale, often linking migrations with criminality, terrorism or prostitution (Triandafyllidou 2012, 389).

Negative political discourses on immigration often resort to different linguistic expressions to describe this phenomenon, particularly with regard to irregular migrations. In this sense, political leaders frequently use metaphors related to natural catastrophes to describe the arrival of large number of migrants. Take for example Italy's former Prime Minister Berlusconi's speech resorting to the wording 'human tsunami' to refer to the growing number of migrants arriving in Italy in 2011 (Corriere Della Sera 2011). Thus, expressions connected to natural disasters serve as a securitarian element in the politicians' speech, as they imply that those migrants pose a threat to internal security. The media also uses those metaphors for greater impact among its audience. That is the case with some of the headlines of the Washington Times – 'Stop the immigration *flood'* (Thomas 2015) ; BBC News – 'Migrants *flood* trains in desperate bid to leave Italy' (Bell 2015) ; or Mail Online – 'Forget the Greek crisis or Britain's referendum, this *tidal wave* of migrants could be the biggest threat to Europe since the war, writes Michael Burleigh' (Burleigh 2015).

From British Prime Minister David Cameron's use of the expression 'swarm' to address the 'Calais crisis' (Elgot 2015), to former French President Nicolás Sarkozy's metaphor of a 'leak in the kitchen' to ridicule the Commission's proposal to relocate refugees – later used by the Spanish Interior Minister Férnandez Díaz (Sánchez 2015) – a number of similar terms were used to depict the refugees reaching European shores during the current migratory crisis. These negative statements by political leaders potentiate racist and xenophobic feelings among local populations, which have been criticised by civil society organisations, such as Amnesty International, and even by the United Nations (United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (UNHCR) 2015).

Furthermore, since 9/11 there has been a growing association between migration and terrorism. The speeches portraying immigrants as terrorists have gained momentum during the current migratory crisis, given the presence of the Islamic State in Syria. In this sense, political leaders have expressed their 'fear' that jihadi terrorists might be among those seeking international protection in Europe. An example of this is the concern expressed by the Spanish Interior Minister that a group of jihadi terrorists might enter Spain along with the refugees relocated to the country

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(EFE 2014). In the end, these negative discourses and statements portray migrations as a threat to European Member States, generating fear and rejection among host societies.

Nevertheless, a humanitarian and solidarity approach is also present in many other speeches, particularly the ones from the leaders of the EU's institutions. European leaders, such as the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, or the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, have called for collective action, solidarity and courage to face the migratory crisis. Jean-Claude Juncker issued a statement which openly showed his concern about the '(…) resentment, the rejection, the fear directed against these people by some parts of the population' (Juncker 2015).

In this line, the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi took a stronger stance threatening to 'hurt' Europe if it remained paralysed in the face of the migratory crisis (Agence France-Presse 2015). French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve criticised the French far-right *Front National* party's proposal to reinstate border checks, calling it a 'stupid' idea (Boudet 2015). Other political leaders have called for action and solidarity from the EU and its Member States, while sometimes being reluctant to adopt some of the measures on the table. That was the case of the Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, who, after the 19 April 2015 tragedy in the Mediterranean claimed that, 'Words are now worthless, we need to act' (Eldiario.es 2015), and later rejecting the scheme proposed for the relocation of refugees.

Another relevant leader worth mentioning is Pope Francis, whose messages reach beyond the Catholic world. When visiting Lampedusa in 2013, remembering the many hundreds of migrants who had died in their attempt to reach European shores, the Pope talked about the 'globalisation of indifference' regarding our current world, calling for international solidarity towards these tragedies (Staff Reporter 2015).

The securitising actor, in this case European leaders, is the one who speaks security. If it is true that the wording used in the speeches may speak for itself and have a great impact in public opinion, the figure of the leader himself or herself is a crucial element in the acceptance of the audience. In this sense, if it is a well-respected leader speaking security it will have a greater acceptance among a wider public.

Public Perceptions and Opinions

Narratives and practices on immigration and security shape citizens' perspectives about immigration. In the EU, public opinion about immigration and racist attitudes has suffered slight changes over the last decades, as well as the perception of threats to internal security.

An analysis of the Eurobarometer surveys on racism and xenophobia and on internal security from the eighties until now allows us to conclude that despite the different critical moments regarding migrations, there has been no significant impact in terms of the public opinion's perceptions. However, in 2015 there was a high increase from the 2011 survey, from 13% to 19%, on the Europeans' perception of migrations as a security challenge (European Commission 2015d, 6–9). In general, European citizens consider the EU as a critical element in the development of policies and strategies to face the different threats to European security. Moreover, Europeans believe that internal security is linked to external events, thus supporting a common answer to these threats. European citizens in general advocate common immigration and asylum policies, while requesting stricter controls of the external borders (European Commission 2015d).

Furthermore, we should also mention the increasing importance that far-right/right-wing populist parties have in European policies, based on an ethnocentric ideology and often opposing pro-immigration policies. These parties focus on the national identity axis, where the 'other' is not part of the society, thus leading to racist and extremist discourses. The break of the migratory crisis and the terrorist attacks that have spread around Europe over in recent years (Paris, Brussels, or more recently, London) have paved the way for a growing Euroscepticism and an increasing support for these populist parties. They have established and reinforced their presence in Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden, where they have acquired significant political visibility and power (Gutteridge 2015). It is interesting to observe that the far-right has

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had a pronounced impact in Central European Member States, which are most of the refugees' host countries.

These results are in line with the slight growth registered in the perception of irregular migrations as a security threat to the EU and its Member States, and demonstrate the acceptance of the anti-immigrant, racist and nationalist discourses of these parties' leaders. In this sense, it would be interesting to analyse discourses of a group of far-right parties around the EU and its impact on the different societies.

Final Remarks

The current migratory crisis has highlighted the handicaps of the EU's common immigration, border and asylum policies, as well as the growing securitisation of these policies. The call for Member States' solidarity to face this crisis has collided with Member States' own political interests, creating internal frictions and dissidences. Most of the measures adopted to face this humanitarian crisis were based on low common denominators, and the EU seems to be falling short in accomplishing them. In March 2017, the European Commission called for renewed efforts from Member States to implement the relocation and resettlement schemes, where progress was slow in its first moment and now seems to be promising, with a total of 13,546 relocations and 14,422 resettlements (European Commission 2017b).

Taking into account the practices and narratives analysed, I conclude that there has been a securitisation of migrations in the EU with the current migratory crisis, through the adoption of exceptional measures that go beyond the sphere of normal politics and the adoption of what might be considered some legally questionable measures (such as the EU-Turkey Agreement). Furthermore, the growing support to far-right parties all around the EU, as well as EU citizens' growing perceptions of migration as a threat to security, legitimises this securitisation of migrations. This should be contrasted with figures regarding migratory flows. In 2015, migrants in the EU represented 6.7% of the total population (around 3.4 million migrants) and in that same year illegal entrances peaked at 5.2%, a representative figure if we consider that there was an increase of 100% in detections of illegal border crossings, compared to the previous year (Eurostat 2016; Frontex 2016 and 2017). In this sense, this feeling of insecurity is the result of a perception of a threat posed by the growing number of irregular migrants entering the EU during this period.

Nevertheless, the adoption of these measures so far has not helped to solve the crisis, rather to circumvent it or even to displace it to other regions, given the EU's incapability to find a common ground to deal with this humanitarian crisis. Therefore, to sustain the Area of Freedom Security and Justice (AFSJ), the EU needs to move beyond a securitarian approach and adopt a coherent and comprehensive strategy regarding migration management, which ensures the security and stability of external borders while preserving the freedom of movement.

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