Insecurities in EU border management: The unintended consequences of securitization processes in the Mediterranean

Inseguridades en la gestión de las fronteras de la UE: Las consecuencias no deseadas de los procesos de securitización en el Mediterráneo

Vanda Amaro Dias ⓘD | vandadias@fl.uc.pt | Corresponding author
University of Coimbra, Portugal

Maria Raquel Freire ⓘD | rfreire@fe.uc.pt
University of Coimbra, Portugal

Abstract

The goal of this article is to shed light on how securitization processes at the European Union (EU)'s southern borders – the Mediterranean – are feeding various insecurities both inside and outside the EU. We follow a sociological approach to securitization which revisits the work by Thierry Balzacq. By adding to the conceptualization of securitization processes as speech acts and the outcome of security practices, this approach contributes to understanding how specific responses to perceived security threats result from contextual dynamics and power relations between significant actors in the security field. The article lies at the convergence of the fields of Anthropology and International Relations adding to efforts to promote a critical reflection about processes of (in)securitization and emancipatory possibilities for social change. The article concludes that the insecurity narratives feeding border dynamics end up in a spiral of insecurity perceptions with implications for borders' management. The need to desecuritize policies and practices becomes, thus, part of the way to rethink possibilities for addressing the structural causes of violence and mass dislocation of people at the southern borders of the EU.

Keywords: border management, European Union, Mediterranean, securitization, security practices.

Resumen

El objeto del presente artículo es clarificar cómo los procesos de securitización en las fronteras sur de la Unión Europea (UE) – el Mediterráneo – están alimentando inseguridades diversas dentro y fuera de la UE. Seguimos un enfoque sociológico de la securitización que retoma la línea de trabajo de Thierry Balzacq. Al sumarse a la conceptualización de los procesos de securitización como actos de habla y resultado de prácticas de seguridad, este enfoque contribuye para comprender cómo las respuestas específicas a las amenazas de seguridad percibidas resultan de la dinámica contextual y las relaciones de poder entre actores importantes en el campo de la seguridad. El artículo se ubica en la convergencia de la Antropología y de las Relaciones Internacionales que se suman a los esfuerzos por promover una reflexión crítica sobre los procesos de (in)securitización y las posibilidades emancipatorias para el cambio social. Se concluye que las narrativas de inseguridad que alimentan las dinámicas fronterizas terminan en una espiral de percepciones de inseguridad con implicaciones para la gestión de fronteras. La necesidad de desecuritizar las políticas y prácticas se convierte, por lo tanto, en parte del camino para repensar las posibilidades de abordar las causas estructurales de la violencia y el desplazamiento masivo de personas en las fronteras sur de la UE.

Palabras clave: *gestión de fronteras, Unión Europea, Mediterráneo, securitización, prácticas de seguridad.*

Summary

1. Introduction | 2. Literature review: Border management and (in)security policies and practices | 3. Theoretical and methodological framework: A sociological approach to the securitization of EU border management | 4. EU border management: A genealogy | 5. Discussion: Processes of (in)securitization in the southern neighborhood – the militarization of border management as a source of insecurity to the "other" | 6. Conclusion | References.

How to cite this article

1. Introduction

Border management has been central to security dynamics since the inception of the process of European integration in the 1950s. Nonetheless, conceptions of borders and the instruments used to deal with perceived security threats have evolved significantly ever since. Demands for a peaceful, prosperous and stable Europe capable of transcending historical rooted patterns of war and conflicts amongst political entities urged the development of manifold platforms for cooperation between states. The success of these platforms was contingent upon the transformation of the reified perception of border perpetuated since the Treaty of Westphalia. Contrary to the border understood as a rigid division between states, spaces and societies that was historically useful to support processes of construction and consolidation of the nation-state, as well as the political configuration of the European space, the urgency of peace and security in the aftermath of the Second World War led the then-European Communities to begin a gradual flexibilization of limits imposed by borders to enable the free circulation of goods, capital, services and, eventually, people.

This liberalization of space was seen as the cornerstone of a broader process of complex interdependence aiming at fostering the development of international institutions and regimes, composed of national and transnational actors, in different social fields to boost cooperation in such ways that the idea of an armed conflict in Europe would become virtually impossible. This process put in motion with the facilitation of the movement of goods, such as coal and steel, in the early 1950s, suffered from a double dynamic of enlargement and deepening resulting in the creation of the Schengen Area, in 1985, and the consequent enforcement of the Schengen Convention in 1995. This space based on the primordial idea of building a Europe without borders was, however, accompanied by an inverse dynamic, implying the gradual strengthening of the external borders of the European Union (EU). Up to this point, borders' management was mostly seen as a technical issue, as a means to achieve the greater good of reinforcing cooperation between European states. With the delocalization of the focus from internal borders in Europe to the external border of the EU a movement towards the politicization and, eventually, securitization of borders became noticeable, both in the political and academic realms. This does not mean, however, internal border dynamics lost relevance, or even that more traditional ways of approaching the border have not been present, as was very noticeable during the pandemic, for example (Gruszczak, 2022; Radil *et al.,* 2021; Paasi *et al.,* 2022). However, in this article we emphasize the shift in focus, which coincided with the development of policies and instruments enabling the EU to assume itself as a power in regional and international affairs, and the multiplication of debates on the purpose and identity the EU should assume as a distinctive international player.

Based on these discussions, this article seeks to contribute to the existing literature on EU security border management processes by focusing on their consequences at the EU's southern borders —the Mediterranean—, which we argue are feeding various insecurities both inside and outside the EU. We follow a sociological approach to securitization which revisits the grid of analysis advanced by Thierry Balzacq (2010), who defines security as a circumstantial process, where context, agency and power relations are fundamental elements. By adding to the conceptualization of securitization processes as speech acts and the outcome of security practices, this approach allows to understand how specific responses to perceived security threats result from contextual dynamics and power relations between significant actors in the security field and not necessarily from a neutral diagnosis of a given threat. This theoretical framework follows a deconstructive methodology composed of two main tools structuring the research: the genealogy of the broader assemblage of EU management of its external borders, and the analysis of discursive practices, including discourse analysis, in a narrower sense, and the interpretation of securitization practices in EU border management. The research design provides the lenses and tools enabling a critical engagement with the production of (in)security in tandem with the field of Anthropology. The post-positivist turn in International Relations allowed for the rediscovery of inter- and multidisciplinarity, thus opening room for important dialogues with fields of knowledge adding to the understanding of complex and ever-evolving international phenomena. The convergence between the fields of Anthropology and International Relations has already been explored as part of an intellectual movement aiming at developing an alternative to international security studies within the scope of critical studies, understood as part of a scientific enterprise that seems to understand, rather than explain based on causal relations, the social constitution of reality in any domain (Weldes *et al.,* 1999). By establishing a dialogical conversation with Anthropology this

contribution envisages adding to these efforts and to promote a critical reflection about processes of (in)securitization and emancipatory possibilities for social change.

To this purpose this article first outlines the literature review on border management and (in)security policies and practices in the EU. It then proceeds with the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding this research. The third section is devoted to the genealogy of EU border management focusing on Frontex and the various mechanisms and policies used to address identified security threats, that not being exhaustive, allows laying ground to analyze discursive practices as a central element in (in)security construction. The next section delves into EU operations in the Mediterranean illustrating how practices have contributed to the definition of threat and insecurity, and consequently to a more militarized response, on the one hand, and to the aggravation of insecurities, on the other hand. The article concludes that a spiral of insecurity has resulted from ongoing border dynamics and suggests the need for a political turn in the way complex security issues are perceived and addressed, as well as a more integrated and cosmopolitan approach with an emancipatory outlook, capable of unveiling reified relations of power and create more inclusiveness both of the alienated "self" and of the invisible local "other", in order to potentially generate more security for all.

2. Literature review: Border management and (in)security policies and practices

In the context of the development of European integration, new debates were taking shape about the implications of borders' reinterpretations and the security dimension implied. New definitions of borders unfolded with a significant impact on how the EU deals with security issues. Challenges related to transnational terrorism, organized crime or to the increasing flow of migrants towards the European space enabled the reconceptualization of border beyond the Westphalian paradigm and to rethink security and insecurity as not necessarily mutually exclusive: security for whom?; whose perceptions of (in)security? Studies delving into EU borders and their management emphasize different dimensions. These include the elasticity of borders, which varies between greater or lesser opening, such as the tendency to remain open to energy flows whilst more closed to migrants/refugees (Freire, 2016), revealing that different understandings of borders are based on the perceived threat/opportunity these carry. There is also a contradiction between the politically framed goal of creating an enlarged space where borders would lose dimensionality, and the need to recover border controls, both within the EU ⸺e.g., in the context of terrorist attacks⸺ and within the scope of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Regarding the latter, the gradual facilitation of circulation was supposed to be implemented as part of the informal integration of neighboring countries, but seemingly surrendered to securitization logics that require stronger border controls. This turns the border into a dividing principle separating those who are part of the European project from those who feel excluded. This dynamic contributes therefore to the creation of new dividing lines and new stages of peripheralization symptomatic of a growing hiatus between political objectives as identified in official discourses and documents, which are often ambivalent, and the tangible results achieved. In this regard, what was politically framed as a more porous border becomes in practice a more rigid delimitation, and what would arguably conduce to a gradual approximation between the internal and external dimensions of security becomes a source of normalization of manifold exclusions (see e.g., Martins & Jumbert, 2020).

This multidimensional conceptualization of the border relates to processes of securitization, as a response to a threat, whether perceived, imagined or real (see e.g., Neuman, 2016). A significant part of these processes has been framed by critical security studies (Brambilla, 2015) and, in particular, by the so-called securitization theories. However, these analyses tend to identify the EU as a monolithic actor and to overlook the complex institutional assemblages, both inside and outside Europe, where securitization processes occur. Furthermore, it is also noticeable a trend to emphasize speech acts, as defined by the Copenhagen School, as the foundational moment of securitization processes, thus marginalizing the analysis of security practices. Overall, the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization conveys that the world ⸺security threats included⸺ is socially constructed. As a result, the objective verification of a given security threat is rendered impossible and analytical efforts are redirected to the understanding of how a given issue is constructed and accepted as a security problem.

According to this approach, processes of securitization are produced by speech acts, articulated by legitimate actors seeking to define threats to a referent object, and accepted as such by the audience of the

speech act. When successful the securitizing move will lead to the legitimate adoption of urgent political measures as a means of assuring security, or put differently, the management of the security threat is removed from the realm of normal politics and transferred to the field of exceptionality (Buzan *et al.,* 1998). However useful to understand how a given issue is intersubjectively constructed as a security threat, this discourse-centered approach has been criticized due to its understanding of securitization as a causal mechanism – if security is spoken, then security happens (Guzzini, 2015, p. 24). Moreover, its incipient explanation of key dimensions of securitization processes, such as context, agency and power relations (Balzacq, 2010) renders the discourse-centered approach unfit to grasp how these processes are shaped. Criticisms also pertain to the unpreparedness to explain securitization processes in complex polities such as the EU, where the identification of securitizing actors, security threats, referent objects and exceptional measures varies significantly across different policies and governance spaces. And finally, this discourse-centered approach is criticized for its analytical negligence of security practices that unfold with little or no discursive design (Balzacq, 2010; Bigo, 2002).

In order to address these shortcomings, a sociological approach to securitization focused on the mapping and analysis of security practices emerged as an alternative to identify and explain dynamics and practices of securitization at the EU level. Didier Bigo (2002) first introduced this approach to the study of the securitization of EU border management and migrations. The author argues that the performance of bureaucratic structures and networks linked to security practices may have a more decisive role in securitization processes than speech acts. This move opens important avenues to understand how security is pursued in practice and its more structural implications in the (re)definition of security threats, securitizing actors, referent objects, and ultimately of the social world. When it comes to the analysis of EU border management, this move was central to understand how, in the path of consolidating security, other insecurities are often created.

The idea of "fortress Europe" as an outcome of securitization processes at the EU's external borders (Ibrahim & Howarth, 2018, p. 1473), is demonstrative of this apparent incongruence and of tensions between a reading of the EU's external border as simultaneously a locus of approximation and of exclusion. As Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2016, p. 318) suggest, reading problems in the Mediterranean as a European crisis or at least a security threat that profoundly affects the EU, ignores the structural role that EU border management plays in many deaths in the Mediterranean and in the aggravation of a growing climate of insecurity in the EU's southern neighborhood, demonstrating the inability to deal with the intersection between the protection of the human subject and border control practices. The authors argue that this dynamic reproduces the idea of the EU-Europe as an exclusive space. As Orsini (2016, p. 136) argues, the securitization of EU borders occurred in parallel and somehow legitimated the construction of several detention centers to control the movement of migrants/refugees. The end result has been turning the border into a massive security dispositive whose functions do not necessarily respond to the security requirements at the basis of their foundation – in Lampedusa, for example, the border generated a series of dynamics that became a source of insecurity for the island's inhabitants. As the author suggests, looking at the dynamics of border securitization from the perspective of the inhabitants of Lampedusa brings a different image regarding the construction of (in)security (Orsini, 2016, p. 145).

In this same line, the idea of Europe as a "technological fortress" (Csernatoni, 2018, p. 176) has gained momentum with implications regarding the tools and technology used, including collection of biometric data and the use of drones for border surveillance purposes, among others. This contributes to defining the border and the management of security in a more material way, thus leading to its dehumanization. Csernatoni (2018, p. 176) argues that this technologization of the border reflects difficulties in dealing with the migration/refugees by other means, thus seeking in a technical way to circumvent criticisms of policies whose results in the management of the EU's external border with the neighborhood have been ineffective. We further argue that the securitization of EU border management needs to be framed as a complex process operating in multiple dimensions, involving different actors and political fields that in a comprehensive manner have been contributing to the militarization of EU southern borders. This results from the normalization and technocratization of EU border management following the construction of a given perception of security threat that not only does not necessarily correspond to perceptions of insecurity of the "other" outside the EU, but aggravates the root causes of instability in the EU's southern neighborhood.

3. Theoretical and methodological framework: A sociological approach to the securitization of EU border management

Sociological approaches to securitization were introduced in the analysis of European border management and immigration security phenomena by Didier Bigo (2002), who stresses the importance of understanding the construction of securitization processes beyond or in the absence of speech acts, as defined by the Copenhagen School. The author underlines that:

> Securitization (…) emerges from the correlation between some successful speech acts of political leaders, the mobilization they create for and against some groups of people, and the specific field of security professionals (…). It comes also from a range of administrative practices such as the population profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation (…), and what may be termed a specific *habitus* of the 'security professional' with its ethos of secrecy and concern for the management of fear and unease. (Bigo, 2002, pp. 65-66)

As such, bureaucratic structures and networks related to security practices may have a more determining role in the construction and unfolding of securitization processes than speech acts, understood as the mere enunciation of security by legitimate actors before a relevant audience. However, for speech acts continue playing a meaningful role in these processes —at least at an early stage when the construction of threats takes place in the political realm—, the analysis and mapping of such processes is transferred to discursive practices. In fact, practices are themselves discursive and performative – because they are embedded with meaning and generate structural conditions for further advances in securitization processes (Simão & Dias, 2016, pp. 98-99). Discursive practices refer, thus, to the set of verbal and non-verbal discourses, meanings and practices constitutive of the broader EU security assemblage and, for the sake of the current research, of processes of securitization in the EU's management of its Mediterranean borders. As further argued by Bigo (2014, p. 209), to understand "practices of (in)securitization, actual work routines and the specific professional 'dispositions' are [...] more important than any discourses actors may use to justify their activities". This position is shared by Thierry Balzacq (2010), who proposed an integrated analysis of security practices, discourses and policy tools, the latter corresponding to specific dispositions or social techniques constitutive of a given security perception, thus demanding a security/securitized response.
Balzacq (2010) defines securitization as:

> An articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artefacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt the audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions), about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be taken immediately to block its development (p. 3).

In this reading, securitization processes appear as complex processes of social and political engineering revolving around the mutual constitution of three key elements: context, agency and power relations (Balzacq, 2010). Arguably, the focus on the contextual realm in which securitization processes occur opens important avenues into the understanding of how threats, securitization actors, referent objects and security tools are socially and politically constructed, and of the fabrication and evolution of the meaning of security itself, particularly when these intertwined dimensions unfold in the absence of a clear discursive design. Balzacq further argues that securitization is a meaningful procedure, in a field of forces, marred by a permanent competition between different meanings of what is to be recognized and legitimized as hegemonic (Balzacq, 2010). As such, any attempt to deconstruct securitization processes for analytical purposes has to delve into power struggles and multiple tactics of agents in a specific social realm.

Here, agency becomes a central aspect of securitization. The above-mentioned Copenhagen School conveys a state-centric reading of security processes that hardly captures the intricacy associated with convoluted polities such as the EU. By focusing on the social construction of security beyond the state, the sociological approach to securitization enables the understanding of the EU as a complex political assemblage and of border management as a social field of struggles overlapping across different governance levels, institutions and bodies. Since perceptions of security and interests are not the same in all the dimensions composing the social world, agency is also powerful in so far it envisages to induce effects transforming its surrounding environment according to a given actor worldview (Balzacq, 2010, p. 26). Power,

thus, comes as a relational concept and a central factor in EU securitization processes in two distinct, though contingent, dimensions. Firstly, the securitization of a given issue depends on the EU's capability to construct a threat, and develop the necessary strategies, policies and tools to address it (Simão & Dias, 2016, p. 100). Secondly, securitization processes impact on power distribution which is at the core of competing narratives both inside the EU and between the EU and its foreign partners, which, as further argued in this research, are often projected as a source of insecurity by the EU, thus justifying the adoption of exceptional practices outside its borders.

This articulation between agency and power struggles cannot be fully understood without the contextual factors that both influence and are influenced by them. Therefore, the analysis of security issues and securitization processes needs to rely on the reflexive explanation of how internal and external events, and specific cultural and historical experiences, affect the construction of security/securitization. To that purpose, the researcher needs to reflect upon the broader social setting from which agents gain their power to perform discursive practices envisaging at rendering hegemonic their particular conception of (in)security. In this sense, the analysis of processes of (in)securitization in EU border management with focus on the "macro-environment", or the broader context in which it is embedded, implies a genealogical reading of the broader assemblage of EU management of its external borders, to identify the context in which it unfolds. This is articulated with a focus on the "immediate features of interaction" based on the analysis of discursive practices (Wilkinson, 2010, p. 98). The latter includes discourse analysis, in a narrow sense, and the interpretation of securitization practices in EU border management, to unveil the internal structure of the securitization process, but also its contingency upon and effects on an internal dimension —or on the "other". To this end, we resort to the analysis of a representative sample of official documents and speeches by the European Council, the Council of the EU and the European Commission, here understood as structural actors in the broad structure of EU's external borders governance, as well as the analysis of key security practices in this area, including European missions and operations related to external border management. In the analysis of practices, the focus resides on identifying the transformation and/or co-optation of traditional instruments to address security threats in the field of border management, but also on mapping and interpreting exceptional practices (Léonard & Kaunert, 2020) to assess their contribution to the securitization of border management. This results in an understanding of this management as a diffuse and long-term process, which involves a multiplicity of agents and levels of interaction, all with a significant role in a process of continued (in)securitization of the EU's external borders.

This sociological deconstructive approach is further complemented by an emic approach borrowed from Anthropology and applied in a dialogical manner. Fina Hurtado and Giovanni Ercolani have already stressed the manifold opportunities for cooperation between Anthropology and Security Studies in the study of how power is conceptualized, of how new discourses of security are formed, and how the researcher should have an active role in the transformation of reality, by bringing "his knowledge of the local social, cultural, linguistic, and metaphorical aspects of the local reality" (Hurtado & Ercolani, 2013, p. 43) into the interpretation of social phenomena and the production of knowledge capable of deconstructing the taken-for-granted, exposing relations of power and locating agency (Weldes *et al.,* 1999). This interdisciplinary deconstructive approach with an emic orientation sheds light on how securitization processes are entrenched in power relations based on contextual factors, even though at the surface these processes are portrayed as following an objective problem-solving approach: the reinforcement of EU border controls appears as the logical response to migration/refugees as the identified security threat. However, this rationale not only conceals the deeper process of securitization of EU borders, but it also makes the resolution of this problem contingent upon the EU alone. Even when a more integrated approach is noticeable, it is aimed at containing migrants and/or externalizing the problem. This myopic strategy is oblivious of the root causes of migration and impermeable to a logic of cooperation and conflict resolution with locals, be it governments, regional organizations, or the civil society, and has the perverse effect of worsening living standards in the EU southern neighborhood, which ironically sees the number of migrants/refugees continuously rising. In this regard, the EU is not only contributing to an ineffective resolution of security problems at its borders, but is ultimately acting as a source of insecurity for others. By establishing a fruitful conversation between critical security studies and Anthropology, this contribution aims at exposing processes of (in)securitization at the EU's borders as contextual constructions that "reflect, enact, and reify relations of power" (Weldes *et al.,* 1999, p. 13), where certain actors or groups play a privileged role in the (re)production of such processes, thus contributing to open up awareness of emancipatory alternatives.

4. EU border management: A genealogy

The creation of the Schengen Area, in conjunction with the devaluation of the traditional Westphalian territorial border and the emergence of new borders and spaces – more diffuse and even difficult to identify or define – in the post-Cold War, blurred the internal and external dimensions of security (Wolff, 2008). In this context, the EU's management of external borders gradually gained prominence in high-level political debates. This trend was reinforced by a series of external events related to the end of the Cold War and the consequent transformation of the post-Soviet space, as well as to the increase in migration flows from Central and Eastern Europe. Due to the opt-out of Ireland, the association of third-parties such as Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein –, and the fact that Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Croatia are still in the implementation stage of the Schengen Agreement, the external border of the Schengen Area does not match the external border of the EU (Rijpma, 2009, p. 123). Thus, for the purpose of the current research the term "EU external border" refers to the limits of the space composed of EU member states that are an integral part of the Schengen Agreement[1].

In this context, during the 1990s and early 2000s, the concept of "fortress Europe" emerged to capture the ongoing development of policies and practices aiming at containing the entry of migrants into the EU (Milivojevic, 2013, p. 104). As a result of this process, and with the enforcement of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999, the EU sees its role in border management reinforced, with the transfer of competences from the third pillar ⸺Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)⸺ to the communitarian level, and with the transformation of the Schengen acquis into EU law. Even though this was a gradual process, with the application of a five-year transition period and the obligation to take into consideration EU member states proposals in the scope of the European Commission legislative initiative (Rijpma, 2009, p. 122), it significantly contributed to reinforce a trend of Europeanization in the management of the EU's external border, as outlined since the creation of the Schengen Area. A great deal of this management involves an operational or technical dimension, which has little visibility, but important practical consequences, as this dimension has also been increasingly redirected towards the European level. Simultaneously, the management of external borders becomes more complex with the externalization of JHA, through a series of political initiatives established at the 1999 Tampere Summit, including the strengthening of cooperation in the fight against terrorism and irregular migration (European Council, 1999).

In the early 2000s, debates over the management of external borders gained momentum due to the increase in migration flows from sub-Saharan Africa via the Mediterranean routes, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America, and the EU member states' incapability to effectively control their external borders. Given this scenario, in December 2001 the JHA Council decided on the need to strengthen and standardize EU border controls, to foster operational cooperation between member states in the field of external border management, to facilitate border crisis management, and to prevent irregular migration and other forms of cross-border crime (Council of the European Union, 2001). Later in the same month, the Laeken European Council asked the European Commission to draft the terms of cooperation between entities responsible for the management of external borders and to identify the conditions under which common border management platforms could be created. The Commission response was given in 2002, with a Communication on the integrated management of external borders, envisaging the establishment of a financial and operation burden-sharing system among EU member states, as well as the creation of a European border guard body capable of ensuring the operational dimension of border management, be it at the request of EU member states or on its own initiative (European Commission, 2002). At this stage, securitization dynamics had acquired greater prominence in discourses proliferating among political elites and the media portraying migrants and other external actors, besides the incipient regulation of the EU's external borders, as a threat to the security and survival of the European project and of its citizens (Neil, 2009).

This process led to a series of strategic and legislative initiatives ⸺including the European Security Strategy, in 2003⸺, which culminated in the strengthening of communitarian competences at the EU level and in the creation of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External

---

[1] The 26 countries included in the Schengen Area are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), in 2004[2] (European Council, 2004). This transfer of external border management to the European operational level removed these ongoing processes from the center of the European political debate and, therefore, from the logics of securitization, as advocated by the Copenhagen School. However, the mitigation of speech acts does not invalidate a clear contribution of Frontex to the securitization of EU border management. In fact, a focus on the analysis of discursive practices reveals the role Frontex has played in the institutionalization —and normalization— of border management and how it has, since an early stage, concentrated its main efforts and initiatives on the control of the EU's southern border, the Mediterranean. To a large extent this resulted from demands by the EU southern member states for a more effective and coordinated response to the management of migration flows from sub-Saharan and northern Africa. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the creation of Operation Ulysses in 2003, a joint effort by the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal and Italy, aimed at preventing irregular migration and human trafficking in the Strait of Gibraltar and the Canary Islands, and by Operation Triton, which under Greek leadership assumed a similar goal in the Eastern Mediterranean. From 2006 onwards, Frontex became an integral part of these efforts, through the coordination of the HERA mission, responsible for fighting irregular migration to the Canary Islands (Wolff, 2008, p. 257).

Over time, Frontex has proven to be a cornerstone of processes of deepening and consolidation of securitization in EU border management. Its policing activities are particularly relevant in this regard, including the implementation of a wide-range of technological tools to gather information on migrants and to regulate migration flows, resulting in the development of what some authors label the "European cyber fortress" (e.g., Milivojevic, 2013). These practices are deeply anchored in the idea of "other" as a security threat, an "other" that assumes multiple and diffuse identities – migrants, criminals, terrorists, refugees. In order to contain these threats, policing techniques became a centerpiece of Frontex's work, including preventive and repressive measures, both at the EU's external borders and in the neighborhood, often involving private actors, the use of biometric data, drones and other forms of surveillance and intelligence collection. Frontex has also developed its own risk analysis model, the Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM), information exchange systems, including the Frontex Situation Centre, the Information and Coordination Network, and the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), all with the aim of contributing to a comprehensive pan-European surveillance system to reduce irregular migration and prevent cross-border crime. Thus, it is possible to pinpoint the construction of new, invisible and deterritorialized borders that protect the European space and add to the traditional physical borders —e.g., the wall on the border between Greece and Turkey— that arguably guarantee EU's security. This technological drive has rested on a partial offshoring of EU border management and policing, depending on cooperation and interaction with third states, which act as a filter and as a structure of containment of migrants considered to be undesirable by the EU —labelled as a "threat" —, therefore reinforcing the externalization of border management. Although this does not represent a clear securitization practice, the technologization of border controls is demonstrative of how European security is increasingly managed at an operational level and of how Frontex has assumed itself as a field for security practices, with a significant and effective impact on the management of migrations (Milivojevic, 2013, p. 102-104).

Progressively, the border management architecture became a complex and polycentric assemblage, composed of policies, bodies and tools both in the internal and external dimensions of the European polity. This is not a novelty in EU policies, nor is it a consequence deriving exclusively from the transformation of EU perceptions of and relations with its external borders. On the contrary, the EU has a record of relations with third countries based on the export of its governance model, based on the assumption that the transformation of its external environment is an essential element for the preservation of peace, stability and security within the EU. This principle was already noticeable in the first initiatives aimed at framing the relationship of the then-European Communities with the so-called ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific), in the scope of trade and development policies since the 1970s.

Nevertheless, this trend gained impetus in the post-Cold War in the context of, firstly, the Enlargement Policy eastwards and, later, the ENP, in 2004. Indeed, border management is an integral part of Action Plans concluded with neighboring countries, including measures related to the training and qualification of border guards, to the internalization of the European acquis in the field of JHA, to the adoption of good governance practices, and to cross-border cooperation programs with countries sharing a physical border with EU

---

[2] Frontex initiated functions in October 2005 and was integrated in the European Border and Coast Guard in 2016, following Regulation 2016/1624 (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016).

member states (Wolff, 2008, p. 254). However, these externalization processes are not accompanied by the development of a symmetrical relation with EU partners, since their inclusion in the formulation of EU Action Plans is rather limited. In a different wording, this dynamic has been mostly based on a unilateral and imposing approach to exporting EU regulations —e.g., cooperation agreements with Frontex—, as well as its strategic security interests in the non-European space, including policing strategies often based on the promise of advancing negotiations on visa facilitation regimes for the most compliant partner. Since this logic is more intense in countries in the neighborhood, here understood as partners covered by the Enlargement Policy and the ENP, what is revealed in practice is the construction of segregation zones, or of a buffer zone, at the European periphery, hindering access to the EU and crystallizing a space that separates European security from an increasingly dangerous and unstable outside world (Milivojevic, 2013, pp. 105-108).

Thus, the reinforcement of EU border security policies can be interpreted as a broader multidimensional process that involves different actors and policy areas that, when taken as a whole, seemingly confirms a trend towards the Europeanization, externalization, securitization (Baird, 2018, p. 118) and, as analyzed in the next section, militarization of border management. In a logic that simultaneously responds to multiple threats and promotes security along its border, the EU develops these instruments and policies to deal with multiple insecurities resulting from armed violence, organized crime and illegal trafficking, among others, and promote resilience inside and outside its borders. The discursive dimension of practices associated with this comprehensive approach are explored in the next section, which focuses on the post-Lisbon treaty context and on processes of securitization in the EU's southern border. The analysis of naval military operations in the Mediterranean not only illustrates these dynamics, but also exposes how border management has unfolded with little regard for the root causes of problems or the resolution of disruptive events discursively constructed by the EU as a security threat, thus turning the EU into a potential source of insecurity to the "other".

5. Discussion: Processes of (in)securitization in the southern neighbourhood - the militarization of border management as a source of insecurity to the "other"

The increase in the influx of migrants and refugees from North Africa and the Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring violent conflicts —e.g., Libya and Syria— and the deterioration of living conditions and civil liberties in the region, triggered a security response by the EU contributing to the reinforcement of controls and policing tools at its external borders, as seen above. This process was further consolidated by the European Agenda on Migration of 2015, which prioritizes the strengthening of border control measures, including the development of new surveillance techniques and the expansion of asylum and visa application databases, as well as an increase in monitoring and referencing of cross-border crimes (European Commission, 2015a).

This approach to border management results, at least partially, from the social and political context in which it unfolds. Such context marks the convergence of different phenomena, involving growing social tension, both inside and outside the EU arising from the 2014-2015 migration crisis, and demands by private security companies for an urgent reinforcement of the EU external border and for greater interconnection between the internal and external dimensions of security for the sake of assuring European stability. Likewise, at this point, a substantial advance by far-right political parties with xenophobic and racist agendas that threatened the survival of the European liberal democracy model becomes noticeable, thus enabling the identification of the migrant/refugee as a security threat that required and justified the bolstering of the European crisis management device (Baird, 2018, p. 123). These contextual dynamics are closely articulated with the European Security Agenda, which further contributes to the centrality of surveillance and intelligence mechanisms in border management, deepened by the Schengen Information System (SIS) created in 1995 to promote border management cooperation but refined and presented in a more consolidated version (SIS II) to make information exchange —including biometric data— between EU member states more efficient. It also envisages to boost information-sharing in the maritime domain (European Commission, 2015b), something that follows from advances presented in the EU's Maritime Security Strategy. This represents a step towards the consolidation of the technologization of border management that feeds the ongoing

reinforcement of the "European cyber fortress", which becomes visible with the analysis of contextual factors and discursive practices in the southern neighborhood.

Operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia created in 2015 aimed to provide a more integrated and efficient response to the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, at a stage where the death toll was reaching alarming levels and being referred to by international organizations and non-governmental organizations as the greatest humanitarian disaster relating to migrations since World War II. Officially, the objective of this operation was to play a significant role in addressing the root causes of the migration crisis and in preventing more people from dying in the attempt to reach European territory (European Council, 2015). Despite the humanitarian principles that formally frame the inception of this operation, including the name "Sophia", resulting from the birth of the child of a rescued refugee on board of one of the operation's frigates, a genealogical approach to EU border management practices and the analysis of security discursive practices sheds light on the fact that this was a further step in an ongoing process of deepening the securitization, and militarization, of border management in the Mediterranean.

Operation Sophia is the EU's second naval mission[3], performing a key role in a trend of militarization of border management towards the South, but also in the reinforcement of its maritime dimension that deepens the intertwinement between the EU's security policies internal and external dimensions (Riddervold, 2018, pp.159-161). In addition, this operation expands the Europeanization of border management. Although Operation Sophia falls within the scope of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), thus having an eminently intergovernmental nature, its operationalization is commanded by the EU, namely via the President of the EU Military Committee and the EU Military Operation Commander. This applies to the Operation's four phases: 1) deployment of forces and assessment through information gathering and offshore patrolling; 2) boarding, search, seizure and diversion of vessels suspected of illegal activity by migrants or human trafficking in persons on the high seas, both in the territorial waters of EU Member States, and, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2240/2015, of Libya; 3) deactivate human trafficking networks and destruct ships or related goods suspected of being used in clandestine activities by migrants in the territorial waters of Libya; and 4) withdrawal of forces and completion of the operation (European Council, 2015).

Furthermore, Operation Sophia can be considered the first EU military operation with an explicitly coercive mandate, as it receives a robust mandate falling under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter that includes activities in the territorial waters of a third state (Riddervold, 2018, p. 161). As such, Operation Sophia contributes not only to the militarization of the management of the EU's external borders, but to their legitimacy before the international community. Following Sarah Wolff's (2008) argument that the EU's internal security has become a foreign policy objective, the undisputable inclusion of the CSDP in border management (Johansen, 2017, pp. 515-516) allows us to further argue that domestic policies became a significant part of EU foreign policy, closing the complex cycle of EU security policies, together with what had already happened with the Enlargement Policy and the ENP. However, in this process, the identified source of insecurity – migrants and refugees – is not effectively addressed, but merely contained, thus raising doubts regarding commitment to an effective resolution of the problems at its origin and the security of the "other".

In the same line of argumentation, Frontex operations Triton and Poseidon reinforced the surveillance dimension of border management. Although patrol and rescue activities are always mentioned in these operations' mandates, their practical focus resides on border control and surveillance rather than on a humanitarian mission. In fact, Operation Triton was deployed in November 2014, at the request of the Italian authorities, with a reinforced mandate in border surveillance and control. After a disaster resulting in the death of 300 migrants/refugees off the Italian coast in October 2013, the Italian government engaged in search and rescue activities through Operation Mare Nostrum, with EU support. However, demands for a stronger support to these activities led to the creation of Frontex Operation Triton, coordinated by Italy, but under EU structures and command (Nováky, 2018). Its geographical area of activity is located around the coast of Italy and Malta, but it does not get as close to Libya as the former Operation Mare Nostrum and its budget is also more limited. The team specializes in identification, surveillance and control tasks, based on collected data on trafficking networks and routes. This strengthening of controls, which reinforces securitization and militarization processes in the EU's southern neighborhood, is understood by some

---

[3] The first was Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta, established in 2008 to deter, prevent and suppress acts of piracy and armed robberies off the coast of Somalia (European Council, 2008). For more details on Operation Sophia, see e.g., Nováky (2018).

authors as a form of "organized hypocrisy" (Cusumano, 2019). Operations like Triton aim on the one hand to decrease the number of deaths in the Mediterranean, but they also aim to decrease the arrival of migrants at the EU's shores. In this management of differentials between member states, "organized hypocrisy" is resulting in humanitarian crises along the coast of Libya, clearly understood as a "negative externality" (Cusumano, 2019).

Operation Poseidon has similar contours in terms of control and information management at the EU's external borders, but its geographical area of operation covers the maritime space between the Greek coast up to the border with Turkey. Poseidon is increasingly assuming itself as a multifunctional Operation, with a wide range of tasks related to the fight against organized crime, including smuggling of illicit substances, weaponry, forged documents, among others. In the Western Mediterranean, and with similar functions, operations Hera, Indalo and Minerva support Spanish authorities in border surveillance. These Operations coincide with the main access routes to the EU in the Mediterranean, as identified by Frontex (Ibrahim & Howarth, 2018, p. 1471), in order to better respond to challenges associated with border management. Surveillance practices have thus become routinized in the daily management of borders' security, almost bringing a sense of normalcy to the operations carried out, which behind the surface reveal deep securitization dynamics anchored in the definition of the refugee/migrant as a threat. The implication is that these operations are simultaneously the face of security for the EU, and become the materialization of the face of insecurity for the "other".

In February 2020, Operation IRINI was deployed in the Mediterranean, replacing Operation Sophia. The outline of this Operation, which falls under the scope of the CSDP, confirms and reinforces the trend towards the militarization of the EU's southern border, through the use of naval, air and satellite technologies. The objective is to strengthen EU borders, at the internal level, via a continuous blocking of access by an "other" – migrant/refugee – seen as a threat, and, at the external level, through the training of the Libyan Border and Coast Guard, under the responsibility of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (European External Action Service, 2020). Overall, the above-analyzed operations represent an advancement in an increasingly militarized response to perceived external security threats, containing migrants/refugees and deterring their access to European territory. As such, they become, at least symbolically, part of the representation of this "fortress Europe", but also a pragmatic, though essential, element in the logic of securitization and militarization of its borders. The insecurity feelings this generates in the "other" – migrants/refugees – only aggrandizes the persisting difficulties in the integration of these individuals, while not offering much in terms of structural conflict management. This means the securitization dynamics put in place regarding the Mediterranean borders of the EU, have generated a spiral of insecurity, leading to militarization trends, which have contributed to more insecurity perceptions.

Following a sociological approach with an emic orientation as proposed in this article, and looking at security as a circumstantial process, it becomes evident the linkage between the definition of a context of threat ⸺the Mediterranean⸺, where the EU is empowered and has agency to respond to the threatening "other", the migrants/refugees, in order to reinstate a perception of security, which is constantly reinforced by insecurity feelings. This same logic might be applied to the local context in the Mediterranean from where these migrants/refugees depart, mostly fleeing from war and violence, the context, where their agency is denied and pushing them to an unequal power relation where they face walls and fences, along with militarized surveillance, bringing in more insecurity to an already insecure "self". The securitization processes in the Mediterranean incarnating speech acts performed at EU level in the assemblage of actors involved in these processes, as analyzed earlier, and the outcome of the security practices put in place, such as the naval operations and border control mechanisms, show how the EU response to this perceived security threat results from contextual dynamics and power relations, more than just from the neutral acknowledgment of a given issue as a threat. Thus, the discursive construction follows a militarization defensive path built around the understanding of the "threat", rather than looking at creative ways to address the structural problems underlying differences and transforming these into positive constructs, where the "other" assumes contextual agency. The narrative of this "threatening other" has allowed border management to become militarized, using new control methods, invasive surveillance techniques and justifying these practices on the grounds of security-building for the EU. As Bigo (2014, p. 212) explains clearly:

> The terminology of a 'war on migrants' that appeals to some professionals within the field of politics, to large sectors of the media and to critical NGOs is partly misleading if this term is intended to subsume the complexity of border control under these violent practices and explain them through a simplistic narrative of geopolitics and conflicts of civilizations.

This path leads to more insecurity and prevents a cosmopolitan approach, more emancipatory, inclusive and able to break this insecurity-building spiral, from taking root with deep implication for the EU, and the way it is perceived as a security actor both from within, where perceptions of the EU as a powerful security actor in internal and external affairs becomes increasingly naturalized —thus alienating its audiences and their ability to engage in alternative worldviews—, and from the Mediterranean "other", who becomes reduced to an invisible subject devoid of agential power.

6. Conclusion

Officially, the EU does not recognize external border management as a fully integrated security policy, but merely as an integrated management effort (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016). However, a sociological approach focused on context, agency and power relations, as revealed by the genealogy and analysis of discursive practices embedded in the securitization of border management, suggests that this field has been consolidating itself as a complex political assemblage involving different European common policies: Enlargement, Development and Cooperation, JHA, Common Foreign and Security Policy, CFSD and the ENP; actors: member states, European institutions, EU bodies and agencies; transnational actors and non-governmental organizations; strategies and practices.

Marginal to the focus on the visibility and impact of emergency speech acts, as suggested by the Copenhagen School, the gradual formation and normalization of this assemblage becomes notorious when we transfer the analysis of securitization processes to a less observable dimension, such as the operational plan and the field of meanings. As such, in the absence of clear speech acts, the focus on contextual factors and discursive practices associated both with the evolution of EU border management and with the various Operations deployed in the Mediterranean opens new avenues to understand how ongoing processes of securitization in the EU's southern borders often unfold outside the political spectrum and are under a process of transformation conducting to an increasing Europeanization, externalization and, more recently, militarization of the "fortress Europe".

Insecurity narratives supporting these processes, thus, become a self-fulfilling prophecy, by justifying practices that to offer a perception of security to the EU, bring a sense of more insecurity to the "other". In the management of the EU's southern border, and particularly when addressing the migrant/refugee "threat", the need to desecuritize policies and practices becomes part of the way to rethink possibilities for addressing the structural causes of violence and mass dislocation of people. Erecting walls may stop the flow, but will not solve it. Labelling the "refugee/migrant other" as the threat, might legitimize securitization dynamics and even militarization trends in border management, but will not necessarily bring more security. From the moment the building of EU-security amounts to the building of the Mediterranean-"other" insecurity, the spiraling effect in insecurity-building will clash with any attempts at deeply engaging with the root causes of the problems underneath these massive fluxes of individuals towards the EU space.

This is a diffused and long-term process with significant implications in several areas and levels of social and political life, inside and outside the EU-Europe. Although border management is a topic of discussion privileged by political and scientific communities, this research has shown that they remain too partial and segmented, not being able to capture, problematize and understand all the complexity of this social terrain, nor their implications, not only for the (re)design of the EU-Europe border and boundaries, but also for the way the EU has developed as a security actor, the way the EU has been able to construct security threats, and for understanding how the EU's identity has evolved in the dichotomous and asymmetrical relationship with the "other". These are essential questions for understanding (and acting in) the wider European space, but also for developing alternatives to mainstream approaches to (in)security in International Relations, which remain limited in their reading of how security and insecurity dynamics coexist in the ongoing cycle of social (re)construction. In the same manner, these approaches remain incipient in their capability to both include local knowledge and the local "other" as a referential object and relevant agent in order to trigger a political turn towards a more cosmopolitan approach to security, thus requiring a clear and continuous commitment to research in these dimensions. This attempt to establish a conversation with Anthropology in order to deconstruct processes of (in)securitization in EU border management, further exposed the deep power relations they conceal and how dominant representations of threats/(in)security have been used by the EU to remove from critical analysis and political debate what can be labelled as an interested construction,

endowing a particular representation of reality that is advantageous to the reinforcement of its role as a regional and global power. By doing so we hope to contribute to further reflections on possible alternatives and the development of an emancipatory cosmopolitanism, understood not as the imposition of a given reality or worldview over another, but as a field of reciprocity, acceptance and interaction based on recognition, rather than on various impositions and subjugating security practices.

References

Baird, T. (2018). Interest groups and strategic constructivism: business actors and border security policies in the European Union. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 44*(1), 118-136. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1316185

Balzacq, T. (2010). A theory of securitization: Origins, core assumptions, and variants. In T. Balzacq (Ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (pp. 1-30). Routledge.

Bigo, D. (2002). Security and immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease. *Alternatives*, *27*(Special Issue), 63-92. https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754020270S105

Bigo, D. (2014). The (in)securitization practices of the three universes of EU border control: Military/Navy – border guards/police – database analysts. *Security Dialogue, 45*(3), 209-225. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614530459

Brambilla, C. (2015). Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept. *Geopolitics, 20*(1), 14-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Walde, J. (1998). *Security: a new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Council of the European Union. (2001). 2396th Council Meeting – Justice, Home Affairs and Civil Protection. Brussels, 6-7 December 2001. 14581/01 (Presse 444).

Csernatoni, R. (2018). Constructing the EU's high-tech borders: FRONTEX and dual-use drones for border management. *European Security, 27*(2), 175-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1481396

Cusumano, E. (2019). Migrant rescue as organized hypocrisy: EU maritime missions offshore Libya between humanitarianism and border control. *Cooperation and Conflict, 54*(1), 3-24.

European Commission. (2002). Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament Towards Integrated Management of the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union. Brussels, 7 May 2002. COM(2002) 233 final.

European Commission. (2015a). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A European Agenda on Migration. Brussels, 13 May 2015. COM(2015) 240 final.

European Commission. (2015b). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The European Agenda on Security. Brussels, 28 April 2015. COM(2015) 185 final.

European Council. (1999). Presidency Conclusions European Council meeting in Tampere. Tampere, 15-16 October 1999. DOC/200/1.

European Council. (2004). Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 of 26 October 2004 establishing a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union. Brussels, 25 November 2004, JO L349, 1-11.

European Council. (2008). Council Joint Action 2008/851/CFSP of 10 November 2008 on a European Union military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast. Brussels, 12 November 2008, JO L301, 33-37.

European Council. (2015). Council Decision (CFSP) 2015/778 of 18 May 2015 on a European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED). Brussels, 19 May 2015, JO L112, 31-35.

European External Action Service (2020) Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. https://www.operationirini.eu

European Parliament, & Council of the European Union. (2016). Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC. Brussels, 16 September 2016, JO L251, 1-76.

Freire, M.R. (2016). Fronteiras Elásticas? Interpretações e DesVirtuações do Conceito de Fronteira: O Caso da Rússia. In F.J. Ludwig, & L.S. Barros (Eds.), *(Re)Definições das Fronteiras: Visões Interdisciplinares* (pp. 31-42). Juruá Editora.

Gruszczak. A. (2022). Internal Rebordering in the European Union: Postfunctionalism Revisited. *Politics and Governance, 10*(2), 246-255. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i2.5165

Guzzini, S. (2015). A história dual da securitização. In A. Barrinha, & Freire (Eds.), *Segurança, Liberdade e Política: Pensar a Escola de Copenhaga em Português* (pp. 15-32). Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.

Hurtado, F., & Ercolani, G. (2013). Introduction: Anthropology and Security Studies. In F. Hurtado, & G. Ercolani (Eds.), *Anthropology and Security Studies* (pp. 25-54). Universidad de Murcia, Nottingham Trent University & College of William and Mary (USA).

Ibrahim, Y., & Howarth, A. (2018). Communicating the 'migrant' other as risk: space, EU and expanding borders. *Journal of Risk Research, 21*(12), 1465-1486. https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2017.1313765

Jeandesboz, J., & Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2016). Crisis, Routine, Consolidation: The Politics of the Mediterranean Migration Crisis. *Mediterranean Politics, 21*(2), 316-320. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2016.1145825

Johansen, A.I. (2017). Assessing the European Union's strategic capacity: the case of EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia. *European Security, 26*(4), 507-526. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1361933

Leónard, S., & Kaunert, C. (2022). The securitization of migration in the European Union: Frontex and its evolving practices. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 48*(6), 1471-1429. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1851469

Martins, B.O., & Jumbert, M.G. (2022). EU Border technologies and the co-production of security 'problems' and 'solutions'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 48*(6), 1430-1447. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1851470

Milivojevic, S. (2013). Borders, technology and (im)mobility: 'Cyber-Fortress Europe' and its emerging Southeast frontier. *Australian Journal of Human Rights, 19*(3), 101-123. https://doi.org/10.1080/1323-238X.2013.11882136

Neil, A. (2009). Securitization and Risk at the EU Border: The Origins of FRONTEX. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 47*(2), 333-356. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.00807.x

Newman, D. (2016). *Contemporary Research Agendas in Border Studies: An Overview*. Routledge.

Nováky, N. (2018). The road to Sophia: Explaining the EU's naval operation in the Mediterranean. *European View, 17*(2), 197-209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1781685818810359

Orsini, G. (2016). Securitization as a Source of Insecurity: A Ground-Level Look at the Functioning of Europe's External Border in Lampedusa. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism, 16(*1), 135-147. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12170

Paasi, A., Ferdoush, A., Jones, R., Murphy, A.B., Agnew, J., Espejo, P.O., Fall, J.J., & Peterle, G. (2022). Locating the territoriality of territory in border studies. *Political Geography, 95*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102584

Radil, S.M., Pinos, J.C., & Ptak, T. (2021). Borders resurgent: towards a post-Covid-19 global border regime?. *Space and Polity*, 25(1), 132-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2020.1773254

Riddervold, M. (2018). A humanitarian mission in line with human rights? Assessing Sophia, the EU's naval response to the migration crisis. *European Security, 27*(2), 158-174. https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1451842

Rijpma, J. (2009). EU Border Management after the Lisbon Treaty. *Croatian Yearbook of European Law and Policy, 5,* 121-149. https://doi.org/10.3935/cyelp.05.2009.78

Simão, L., & Dias, V.A. (2016). The Securitisation of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: What Role for Russia?. In R. B. Piet, & L. Simão (Eds.), *Security in Shared Neighborhoods – Foreign Policy of Russia, Turkey and the EU* (pp. 97-118). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Weldes, J., Laffey, M., Gusterson, H., & Raymond, D. (1999). Introduction: constructing insecurity. In J. Weldes, M. Laffey, H. Gusterson, & R. Duvall (Eds.), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (pp. 1-33). University of Minnesota Press.

Wilkinson, C. (2010). The limits of spoken words. From meta-narratives to experiences of security. In T. Balzacq (Ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (pp. 94-115). Routledge.

Wolff, S. (2008). Border Management in the Mediterranean: internal, external and ethical challenges. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 21*(2), 253-271. https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570802021030

Brief CV of the authors

Vanda Amaro Dias is PhD in International Politics and Conflict Resolution from the University of Coimbra, researcher at the Centre for Social Studies and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra, in the field of European Studies. Her research interests include peace studies, security studies, foreign policy, EU and post-Soviet space.

Maria Raquel Freire is PhD in International Relations from Kent University, UK, researcher at the Centre for Social Studies and Professor of International Relations at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra. She is also Visiting Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Research interests focus on foreign policy, international security, EU and post-Soviet space.

CRediT author statement

Conceptualization: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Methodology: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Formal Analysis: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Research: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Resources: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Writing (original draft): V.A.D, M.R.F.; Writing (review & edition): V.A.D, M.R.F.; Supervision: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Project Administration: V.A.D, M.R.F.; Funding acquisition: V.A.D, M.R.F.

Funding