

A Missed Window of Opportunity: Migration Crisis and the EU Borders after 2015

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Abstract: *The article discusses the state of the European Union after 2015, when overlapping crises led to new challenges for the EU, which entailed new political dynamics. As the migration and asylum policy of the Union developed at varying rates and depths, the whole policy became non-symmetrical and hard to coordinate, hence weak in the event of a crisis. This vulnerability was demonstrated during the peak of the 2015 refugee crisis that shook Europe and its security and led to immigration politics and an array of problems. This article is a conceptual paper that addresses a number of issues coming to light after the height of the crisis, including the external border policy, the European identity, concerns about the limitations of the liberal state, the politicisation and securitisation of migration, the framing of immigrants, and the phenomenon of reversing the securitisation of migration, which primarily affected Central and Eastern Europe. The article seeks to answer several questions that highlight the irony of using liberal norms for exclusionary purposes, and the degree to which identity politics and policymaking may progressively transcend and reshape the limitations of the liberal states in Europe.*

Keywords: *EU, migration, crisis, limitations of the liberal state, mobilisation of nationalism, European identity.*

Introduction

For the European Union, a crisis is not a completely novel occurrence. Europe has been experiencing integration crises since the 1950s, and different overlapping crises since 2008 (Anderson, 2021). What makes the current situation stand out is its mediatisation and, as Anderson points out, its complexity, duration, and the interdependence of its dimensions (Anderson, 2021). The overlapping crises confront the European integration with new challenges, resulting in a new political dynamic in the member states and the EU itself.

In this research, the term ‘crisis’ is used with the meaning assigned to it by Keeler’s definition: “a situation of large-scale public dissatisfaction or even fear stemming from wide-ranging economic problems and/or an unusual degree of social unrest and/or threats to national security” (Keeler, 1993). According to the specialised literature, complex, acute, and significant crises provide the policymakers with a greater freedom in shaping their policies. Capoccia and Kelemen call this phenomenon a “window of opportunity” (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). Such a situation could generate a broader scope of reforms or even an institutional transformation (Anderson, 2021).

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In order to analyse the crises, we need to categorise them. All the crises are case-specific and differ in *intensity, scope, duration, interactivity, and nature of conflict* (Anderson, 2021). As mentioned above, the EU has been going through a series of crises since 2008: the Eurozone Crisis; the immigration / refugee crisis; Brexit, and crises related to the presidency of Donald Trump and the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Moreover, one cannot disregard the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the ensuing travel restrictions (COM 2022/740), or the way the Belarusian political regime instrumentalised the migrants in 2021. The majority of the aforementioned crises are not yet over, and consequently this fact has created a situation that Zeitlin, Nicoli, Anderson, and other authors, too, call a “*polycrisis*”.

Borders are, in many cases, a research object, but for many, also an epistemological point of view (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). This perception requires a critical analysis of how relations are being redefined and the struggle about issues shaped around these changes. Then, the border studies can become a method in itself as far as the border is conceived as a sight of a struggle (*Ibid.*). Generally, the article is a conceptual paper. Rather than testing the associations, this type of text focuses on proposing new relationships among constructs (Gilson and Goldberg, 2015). The focus is on arguments and the pursuit of introducing an original concept, in this case, the adopted methodological frame of conceptual paper is typology as explained by E. Jaakkola (2020) (see also Cornelissen, 2017, and MacInnis, 2011).

As the EU's member states have developed their migration and asylum policy at different speeds and depths of integration, the Union's policy on these issues became non-symmetrical, differentiated, and, hence, functions on different integration levels, making it hard to coordinate (on institutional and member-state levels), difficult to apply, and ineffective. Schilde and Goodman (2021) describe the result of the EU policy on migration and asylum as being: “*highly differentiated, often uncoordinated, and ultimately weak to a crisis*”.

This weakness was proven during the 2015 height of the migration / refugee crisis that shook Europe's security, and internal policies, as well as the political party balance – thus, making place for the nationalist and populist parties. Although for decades Europe has been a destination for immigration (especially for economic migrants and political refugees from nearby regions), the Libyan crisis led to an upsurge in the number of refugees in 2014. The warning issued by Frontex about this upsurge has gone mainly unnoticed. Multitudes of refugees have attempted to cross the Mediterranean to enter the EU; this situation grew in intensity and, in 2015, it became the *all-encompassing immigration crisis* we all know today. This situation was caused not only by the Libyan crisis, but also by the escalation of the civil war in Syria and the declining living conditions in areas of Central and Northern Africa. The influx of migrants at the frontiers of some EU member states (most notably, of Greece, Italy, Spain, and Hungary) was immense, and the number of asylum seekers doubled, compared to previous years. However, for many immigrants, these countries were not their final destination, but just entry and transit states. Most of them wanted to reach Germany or the states of Northern Europe, to register for asylum. Across the EU, these developments have put a high pressure on several levels (namely on the local, national, and supranational levels), fact which has led to an institutional crisis. The ‘entry’ and ‘transit’ countries were facing humanitarian and security emergencies, and they also needed assistance in transferring refugees to their destination states. This

explains why this crisis manifested itself on different levels throughout the EU: both short-term and long-term issues had to be dealt with.

The arrival towns have been primarily concerned with the immediate housing and food needs of the incoming flow of migrants/refugees. Furthermore, they had to develop a long-term strategy to integrate the newcomers. However, the European Union and its member states had a much more complicated agenda, that implied safeguarding the security of the external borders. In this sense, a modification of the Schengen Accord was deemed necessary. Another critical issue was the strain on policing and counterintelligence, since the influx of refugees triggered the threat of importing terrorism (Niemann and Zaun, 2018). The factor that connected these two levels was the politicisation of the migration crisis, which allowed the growth of the populist backlash in member states (mainly against the possible spread of terrorism and the presence of foreigners, in general). The media provided extensive coverage of the crisis showing the migration flows and asylum seekers' pleas.

This crisis is still producing effects, even though the agreement between the EU and Turkey (signed in March 2016) reduced the number of incoming immigrants / refugees. This agreement is a part of the so-called externalisation of border management. It allows the EU to keep the migrants on the Turkish territory, in exchange for financial reimbursements and modifications to the visa policy toward Turkey's citizens. However, media coverage of the Mediterranean routes has continued, albeit the influx of migrants / refugees decreased to levels similar to those before 2014, and thus it has effectively kept the issue alive in the minds of the European citizens. In this case, some researchers are leaning toward Pierson's earthquake typology, while others, like Anderson, tend to embrace the idea that the migration flows towards Europe might become the new norm. Hence the latter consider the migration crisis as a tipping point in a longer-term evolution of the climate change (Anderson, 2021).

Another enhancing factor of the crisis is the political elite's response to the situation - the most prominent one being that of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015 (Hall, 2015). Moreover, the efforts to equitably redistribute refugees among member states have faced strong opposition, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Niemann and Zaun, 2018). All these actions have fuelled the campaign rhetoric of the populist parties and movements (Art, 2018; Niemann and Zaun, 2018), reinforced by the panic and fear of the citizens of the mentioned countries.

1. Migration Crisis and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

The differences between the internal (domestic) and the external (international) policies are becoming blurred in our globalised world. In this context, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains intergovernmental organised (Riddervold, Troudal, Newsome, 2021): it is based on unitary decisions made by the EU member states, all of them being entitled to veto any proposal they object to. At the same time, it is impossible to bring a non-compliance case before the Court of Justice of the European Union against the member states and for the European Commission because the latter does not have an agenda-setting role. On the other hand, the Council has some decision-making powers, which it does not share with the European Parliament.

The situation is further complicated by the member states' refusal to integrate

their foreign and security policies further, primarily due to concerns over sovereignty and national security. Yet, the outcomes and effects of the 2015 polycrisis have demonstrated to the member states the necessity of better integrating their foreign and security policies (Riddervold, Troudal, Newsome, 2021).

The integration processes of foreign and security policies were always problematic and a subject of criticism (Fiala *et al.*, 2018). As it was mentioned previously, unifying these specific policy areas concerns national (in the case of the EU, also regional) and international interests. Regarding this issue, transferring a part of authority/power to the transnational level has always been problematic and controversial regarding member states' sovereignty. However, as economic integration intensified, the need to put forward a policy that would defend the interests of the member states in the area of international relations became apparent. With this, the border and migration control areas also became a part of the integration processes.

The current state of the CFSP provides evidence in support of the statement that crises lead to the advancement of the European integration. Nowadays, the European integration is influenced by external factors, such as Russia's and China's perceptions of international rules, or the ongoing war in Ukraine. Each member state has its own interests, explicitly shown in its relations with other international actors. Here, we can mention the specificity of the coordinated and joint action toward Russia. Prior to the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, and the current war, the member states of the EU had developed different relations with the Russian Federation, relations that reflected their various economic or strategic interests. Therefore, their policies vis-à-vis Russia differed accordingly (Juncos and Pomorska, 2021).

The Ukrainian crisis is considered a major event that prompted a shift in the behaviour of the EU member states and compelled them to adopt a unified approach towards Russia and other areas of the CFSP. Riddervold argues that the Ukrainian crisis played a crucial role in the development of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and the EU's Arctic policies (which previously had been subjects of controversy). Overall, he points to the idea that the Russian aggression triggered enhanced cooperation within the CFSP (Riddervold, 2021). If we connect this statement to the theory introduced by Ansel, it can be understood that the Ukrainian crisis represented a *critical juncture*, which created a *window of opportunity* for policy change. However, this opportunity was not compelling enough. Nevertheless, in 2015, the peak of the migration crisis provided another *window of opportunity*, as it stressed the need for further integration of the CFSP, and for practical cooperation within that policy area.

The EU addresses the issue of migration and its current impact on society in many of its documents, as it highlights the need to change the previous system and its tools. The crisis shook the system of migration, asylum, and border management. Hence, the policies that were set out, for example, by the Schengen agreement (1985, 1990), Treaty of Maastricht, Treaty of Amsterdam, Treaty of Lisbon, the Dublin system, or the Commission's Communication on smart borders (2008) needed to be modified to better correspond to the current international political system.

Currently (2023), the key documents of the EU recognise the need to support the establishment of a migration policy that would be effective, humanitarian, proactive, and comprehensive instead of strictly conservative policies focused solely on negative

and restrictive approach (Cloos, 2023). There is a visible effort to understand migration as a phenomenon that might become the new norm. Also, the instances of increased flows of irregular migrants tend to be cyclical (TEPSA, 2019) and experience more significant influx approximately every twenty years (*Ibid.*). The updates to the Dublin system, the new solidarity mechanisms, the issue of instrumentalization of migration and asylum, misinformation, the rising phenomenon of post-truth and its impact on society, inequalities, and the need for a sustainable future are a few of the reoccurring focus points of the efforts for new, and modern regulations and policies for sustainable migration and asylum process of the EU (as an example we can mention the New Pact on Migration and Asylum). However, the factors fuelling the migration crisis at its peak are still salient, and new push factors of migrants have surfaced since then (such as the current war in Ukraine). Another issue is the rise of the phenomenon of post-truth, its role in the crisis of liberal democracy, and connection to the disinformation strategy and populism (Dompablo, 2023). This phenomenon uses the concept of otherness (us vs them) and constructs the idea of the refugee in a way that links the term to terrorism, impossible integration and a social risk that is dangerous to the rest of the population (*Ibid.*), hence steers the discussion back to the negative perception of migration and uses the narrative that prioritizes emotions over reason (McIntyre, 2018, and Dompablo, 2023).

2. The EU Border Security, Migration, and Crisis Management

Whenever a significant phenomenon threatens the core values of an actor, or a vital structure, and urgent decisions are required in a climate of uncertainty, that event is considered to be a crisis (Boin *et al.*, 2005). Usually, the crises in the European Union lead to substantial policy reforms, facilitated by that appropriate occasion, which further deepens the integration processes (Jones *et al.*, 2016). The specific reactions (unilateral and temporary) of the EU member states to the migration crisis do not fall under this category (Bosilca, 2021). The crisis within the Integrated Border Management (IBM) caused by the influx of refugees and the deficient security management has put a lot of strain on the asylum policy of the EU. In response, the EU has implemented a series of immediate and medium-term measures in the areas of border control, asylum, and migration. Through these measures it has intended to develop a “common European migration policy” that manages migration flows more effectively (European Commission, 2015a).

In any case, the magnitude of the crisis poses a significant threat to the core values of the whole integration project (Ceccorulli, 2019). In fact, this predicament has generated a provisional and limited disintegration in some member states of the EU, due to their policy choices, and to incremental and unsubstantial reforms of pre-existing policies (Bosilca, 2021). More specifically, the states preferred national solutions rather than supranational policymaking, and their past choices in terms of policymaking have limited the possibilities for fundamental changes through this “window of opportunity”.

The rationale behind the rejection of the policy on the distribution of refugees / asylum-seekers can be explained by the uneven vulnerability to migration pressure among the member states of the European Union. Thus, these countries have upheld different policy preferences, and their stance ultimately led to the aforementioned rejection. Moreover, the border security and asylum policies, which are closely linked to the concept of state sovereignty, have been considered highly sensitive, and, consequently,

member states have tried to control them. As a result, the transfer of significant national competencies to the EU centralised bodies has been met with strong opposition. For that reason, the member states chose to respond to the crisis through unilateral decisions at the expense of common strategies (Bosilca, 2021).

3. The EU External Border Policy

The security of the external border of the European Union is, in a way, a sphere of competition between the domestic governance and the supranational governance. This area of focus touches on sensitive policies and on the sovereignty of each member state, hence their tendency to resist the enhancement and deepening of the integrated border management (IBM). EU's member states strive to maintain control over decision-making processes that target border security, though they acknowledge the need for an EU mechanism which might balance the consequences of the open internal borders and enable burden sharing among member states responsible with safeguarding the external border of the European Union. This situation creates a tense environment in the EU project's politics, law, and legal practice (Trevisanut, 2015).

Additionally, one should take into account the foreign policies of each EU member state and the relationships of the latter with the neighbouring countries. In the beginning, the issue of the delegation of power was the dominant issue in the integrated border management (IBM). However, the events of 9/11 in 2001 and the Arab Spring in 2011 provided an opportunity for further development of the integration process in the field of border control (Carrera, 2010). The need for a coherent strategy was stressed in a document published by the European Commission and entitled "On a Common Policy on Illegal Immigration".

4. The EU Borders and European Identity

The concept of the European project had - and continues to pursue - several objectives. One of its primary aims was to mitigate the force of nationalism and to prevent it from causing conflicts between European nations, as it did during the World War II (Dalton, 2021). Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman considered this a primary objective of the European integration.

The integration process was expected to improve the living conditions of the Europeans and to gradually foster an attachment to the EU project as whole and for the ensuing concept of the European identity (Dalton, 2021). However, it is important to note that the concept of identity is set apart from the EU policies. According to David Easton's theory, a diffuse social backup for a political community is a more profound and persistent form of political support, which can help the whole community grow and navigate through short-term challenges (Easton, 1975). Thus, we can say that the social backup constructed through the EU institutions and norms has significantly contributed to the attachment to the EU project.

The role of norms in emphasising the individuals' identities is widely recognised in the specialised literature. For example, in his work titled "The Nation Form: History and Ideology", Étienne Balibar asserts that individual identities, despite being inherently unique, are shaped by social values and norms. The essential elements of this hypothesis

are what he calls “*the dominant reference points*” that change as time goes by, and the nation’s institutional form evolves (Balibar, 1991).

Moreover, the ideological framework (patriotism or nationalism) underpins the collective identity, fact which becomes an a priori condition for an efficient communication between individual citizens and different social groups. The concepts of us and them / foreigners are particularly relevant in this context. Johann G. Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation (Reden an die deutsche Nation*, published for the first time in 1808), proposes an interesting interpretation of the *external frontiers*: he states that the external frontiers of a nation have to be viewed as a projection and protection of its internal collective personality (Fichte, 1978; Balibar, 1991).

In the same spirit, one could consider the European Union as a cultural community, characterised by shared values that make up what is known as the European identity. The latter is, actually, multidimensional, or multi-layered, and often ambiguously used. So, how could we best define the European identity? Which are the reasons behind this construct? What does the European identity stand for? Who is better qualified to decide what it represents? And how should we set and apply the European values?

It is widely believed that the European identity possesses three prominent features. Firstly, it has been and continues to be shaped by the European elites who employ the terms “us/self” versus “others” to delineate its boundaries. Secondly, it is a form of privileged integration. And lastly, it is a pragmatic construct. To sum up, the concept of “European identity” is a construct developed to eliminate the causes of deep divisions/disagreements, to safeguard integration, to secure legitimacy, and to establish an external dimension of the European integration process. This construct has been in the making since the founding of the University of Bologna (1088), and we can say that its legal basis was provided by the *Treaty of Paris* and the *Treaty of Rome*. Later, in the 1970s, this concept was included in the European Community’s plan and in its foreign relations through the *Declaration on European Identity* (1973) and through *Tiedeman’s Report* (1976).

The contemporary development of Europe has given rise to inquiries about the limitations of the liberal state. This paper also aims to explore the role of boundaries in defining societies in liberal democracies. They can have a symbolic or discursive nature, but they might also challenge the interplay between the various elements that form the specificity of a European state: the territory, the national identity, the model of governance, and the features of policymaking (Adamson *et al.*, 2011). The European states have been re-examining their policies and criteria for integrating migrants into their societies during the so-called *boundary crisis*. Migration waves and the ensuing processes of integration have inevitably raised questions about the boundaries of group identity, and the feeling of belonging to a certain identity group (Alba, 2005; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009; Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

Borders still serve as barriers against external threats and undesirable influences, and thus they ensure a safe space of coexistence for the members of a community/nation. Therefore, it is natural that in our collective imagery borders appear as a security-oriented element. However, recent debates and perspectives on migration have diverted the focus of the discussions to other important issues. It is noteworthy that, despite being a goal destination for many refugees and asylum seekers, Europe only hosts about ten percent of

the international migratory groups. The majority of migrants find refuge in the developing countries - roughly 85% of them (Laine, 2021).

In recent years we have witnessed the development of stricter border policies, which are not exclusively the result of the will of some politicians or of their political parties. Those policies reflect the thinking of the European electorate, who feels that the space within the EU's boundaries, previously deemed safe in its collective imagination, might be endangered by the incoming migrants. That's why some authors mention a revival of the medieval concept of *fortress*, which implies the notion of a safe interior versus an insecure exterior (Laine, 2021). Consequently, nowadays illegal migration is perceived as a threat or a security issue. On the other hand, the border is seen as a protective, yet vulnerable, structure meant to safeguard the national security. The current predicament calls for decisive actions of a strong nation-state (or of other relevant actors) that would provide a solution to the chaos outside. Therefore, the original idea of open borders seems to be effectively *shut down* (Ahtisaari, 2017).

The politicisation of fear during the migration crisis has also been a crucial aspect fuelling exclusion and gatekeeping practices. The recent public discourse has revealed that identity and value-related issues play an essential role in defining Europe and the European identity. Lewin's work on the concept of gatekeeping describes it as being *a crucial element in the individuals' endeavour to understand their world (in its physical, mental, and social dimensions)*. Moreover, Lewin defined therein what he had previously termed their *life space* (Lewin, 1936). However, Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini argue that gatekeeping has more to do with the restrictions on the "*practical legal access to a nation and its institutions*" (Ambrosini and Triandafyllidou, 2011), than with the measures taken to arrest and expel irregular migrants. Overall, the concept of *gatekeeping* presents migration as a threat – in the same vein, the mass-media across Europe has rendered migration as a sensitive issue, and has contributed to it being perceived as a menace not only to our land, but also to our culture, identity, values, and conventional way of life. The whole European identity and its values have then been portrayed as facing a crisis.

5. The concept of identity – state of knowledge in current research

From the beginning of the EU project, there has been a notable degree of uncertainty surrounding the relationship between a supranational identity and the current national identities (Duchesne, 2008). For example, we can mention the annual *Eurobarometer* report on EU Citizenship, which explores the national and European attachments. Another study that delved into this problem is the *European Community Study*, which asked the participants to place themselves (along the geographic continuum) on a scale ranging from a local to a cosmopolitan identity (Inglehart, 1981). The so-called *Linz-Moreno question* (see Moreno, 2005) presents, also, an interesting view on the national/regional identities. This research has depicted the European identity as a future extension of the national identity. The importance of these studies lies in the conceptualization of identities and in the perspectives on the possibilities and manners in which social modernisation influences a linear continuum of identities (that starts from the local identity to reach the supranational identity).

Other similar projects have focused on establishing whether political identities are inclusive or exclusive (Hooghe and Marks, 2004), or on a conceptualization of geographic

identity (it can include attachments to several political levels – city, country, Europe). This idea then states that geographic identities are not exclusive; hence, the attachment can be formed to a region and a nation, to a nation and to Europe, or to neither of them (Clark and Rohrschneider, 2021).

The gap in the current literature is the conceptualization of European identity – what it means to be European, and how we should measure this phenomenon. Is the European identity based on the identification of oneself with the traditions, history, and political institutions of Europe, or is it just a feeling of hope in the European integration project?

6. The Politicisation and Securitisation of Migration in Europe

Migration is currently a controversial, salient, and politicised issue in Europe – the transformation process of perceiving migration has been visible in the last decade. However, the biggest turn came, as it was already expected with the 2015 crisis. As mentioned earlier, immigration has become one of the prominent topics for national elections, and a significant issue in the political agendas of various countries (Grande, Schwarzbözl, and Fatke, 2018).

For this reason, the refugee crisis in the EU has become an essential topic for the citizens of the EU member states and, consequently, for the political parties. This has led to the political parties politicising this issue: some more than others – especially radical parties became essential supporters and PR managers on immigration and kept the problematics salient (Kovář 2022; Grande, Schwarzbözl, Fatke, 2018). It is important to note that this tendency of politicising migration is not limited to one side of the political spectrum: the political parties on both sides of the spectrum have increasingly addressed the immigration issue in their documents since the beginning of the new millennium (Kovář, 2022; Dancygier and Margalit, 2019).

On the other hand, the securitisation of migration is a phenomenon commonly tied to times of crisis, but it is not an exclusive characteristic of these times (Ceyhan, 2002; Bourbeau, 2011). According to Buzan, the concept of “securitisation” refers to the process by which a particular issue, like migration in this instance, is taken out of the “normal” sphere of politics and is placed into the security sphere, where it is defined as a security issue that requires extraordinary defensive moves (Buzan *et al.*, 1998). Securitisation (along with deterrence) has been a central point for migration governance, especially in the case of the EU’s irregular migration policy at the external borders (Anderson, 2014). The 2015 crisis is quite an accurate example of this trend. During the period when the migration crisis was at its peak, the international environment and its actors were confronted with significant displacement of people, migratory flows, and a humanitarian crisis. The EU, in particular, experienced immense pressure during the years 2015-2016, while it faced *irregular crossings of thousands of migrants* through several routes (Frontex, 2022).

The number of irregular border-crossings recorded in this short timespan varied immensely; some institutions did not publish specific data. Instead, they opted to put forward a range of estimated instances of border-crossings. The reason behind this option was the illicit character of the irregular crossings. According to Frontex, an EU agency, 1 822 337 irregular entries were recorded in 2015 at the EU external border. Then, the

most significant pressure (almost half of the irregular crossings: 885 386) was recorded on the Eastern Mediterranean route (Frontex, 2016). Additionally, the number of asylum applications grew significantly, reaching 1 257 000 (Eurostat, 2017).

The political attention drawn to this issue was substantial, and although the scale of the crisis was extensive, the interest in it was disproportionate. This situation changed the dynamics in the EU policies and triggered collective securitisation and restrictive measures (Crawley and Skleparis, 2016). This discourse subsequently normalised the so-called *exceptional measures* responsible for the dehumanisation, and poor living standards endured by the migrants/refugees, etc. Unfortunately, this situation also led to the criminalisation of the immigrants, and of the natives (the Europeans) that offer them help (Cuttitta, 2018). The controversy of this issue can be better understood, if we draw a parallel with the current Ukrainian war: in the latter case, providing support and accommodation is not considered a criminal act, but one of goodwill. On the other hand, aiding, or housing a Syrian, Afghan, or Iraqi citizens is, in some cases, regarded as a criminal act.

Furthermore, societies react to perceived threats by engaging in different activities or by politicising a given topic. However, this happens in response to a threat to the societal security, not to the state itself (Bartoszewicz, 2020). Samuel Huntington once stated that the *iron curtain* would be replaced by the *velvet curtain of civilisation* (Huntington, 1993). This concept of "*velvet curtain*" is a baseline for the current conception of Europe as a "Fortress". It is worth noting that the concept of "Fortress Europe" is an ambivalent one and it is not completely new, as it was already in use during the Second World War.

7. Framing of Migration and Migrants

In 2015, the topic of migration emerged as one of the most salient and powerful triggers for dividing entire societies, as it dominated the public discourse. The ensuing debate, and the way the media framed it, significantly changed societal attitudes toward migration and the migrants, fact which leads us back to the concept of *securitised migration* (Aalberg *et al.*, 2012; Citrin and Sides, 2008; Esses *et al.*, 2017; Lucassen and Lubbers, 2012; Sniderman *et al.*, 2004).

Security can be understood as a phenomenon not solely related to the material distribution of power, but also socially constructed. It exists within social structures, and positions of authority, by virtue of which those in power can convince their electorate that there is something to be feared (a threat that must be effectively recognised, internalised, and responded to) (Buzan, 1990). Therefore, society is the focal point of security concerns. According to Buzan, the state and the society, though made up of the same people, are two distinct entities (Buzan *et al.*, 1990), and the lack of social security enhances the discrepancy between the state and the society or, more precisely, between the society and the political elites (Buzan, 1990).

However, in the case of the 2015 peak of the migration crisis, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, we should consider the phenomenon of reversed securitisation. The migration issue, in these countries, constitutes a reversed or bottom-up securitisation – whereby society securitizes specific issues and thus becomes an agent of securitisation:

the audience (society) is considered an active agent, initiating securitisation dynamics via evident dystopian narratives augmented by the media to which politicians can (but do not have to) respond, feed off, and only afterwards reinforce and cultivate the societal hype so that the securitised becomes the new normal, the new mainstream policy option (Bartoszewicz, 2022).

Subsequently, this perspective was taken over by a significant number of far right and some mainstream political parties who responded to this societal public opinion in order to align with their voters' attitudes and preferences: here we can talk about the concept of 'tactical populism' (as explained by Ormrod and Henneberg, 2010). This situation has been fuelled by the media, which has used the opportunity to include nationalism in daily communication. As a result, xenophobia and, potentially, racism became part of the mainstream in the V4 countries (Stojarová, 2018; Essed, 2002).

In this sense, the media's usage of frames of migration and migrants is deeply concerning. According to Kovář, in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the most frequently employed frames are the security frame, the cultural frame, the economic frame, the victimisation/human interest frame, and the administrative frame (Kovář, 2022). The security and cultural frames are the dominant frames, and they present migration as a security threat and a profound cultural issue that instil fear mainly concerning the future. In a way, the cultural frame can be understood in terms of a *clash of civilisations* (Huntington, 1993). The cultural frame is perceived as the most real, especially in the context of migrants of Muslim origin, who, according to some people, are unable to integrate, and are rarely portrayed as uninformed victims of smugglers or individuals in need of political asylum. Thus, in addition to the economic vs. non-economic migrants, the public specified a new qualifier: differentiating Muslims (mainly from Middle East and North Africa countries) from non-Muslims. Regretfully, we are turning to a time when colonial ideology and Orientalism should be mentioned again. In recent times, there have been instances of European politicians echoing colonialist sentiment in their speeches. Also, the utilisation of fear and generalisation to promote the ideas of the right-wing populist (and of the people who spread disinformation), should be challenged, drawing upon Edward Said's *Orientalism theory*. The conception of European migrants and migrants from third countries (especially MENA and Asia) becomes more apparent as the "us" vs. "them" notion is being used more vividly² – an example could be the easier acceptance of the Ukrainian refugees (2022) in comparison to the "hotspot" approach to the third country nationals, even though the cultural framing of refugees started to affect the Ukrainian refugees as well (especially in CEE), slowly turning the hospitality into "hostipitality" (Derrida 2000a).

Using culture to explain different behaviours is quite dangerous. The *Clash of Civilisations* by Samuel Huntington was first written as an essay in 1993 (and later extended to a book). In his work, Huntington posits that the global political order is undergoing a transformative phase, wherein the source of the conflict shifts from ideological divisions to cultural clashes: *It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural* (Huntington, 1993). In

² Even though there are incentives against discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin (2000).

the later parts of his essay, it is specified that the clash will be chiefly between the Western and non-Western civilisations.

Specifically, Huntington argues that the post-Cold War world will be shaped by a clash between different civilisations, particularly between the Western and Islamic worlds. Some of Huntington's ideas were derived from Bernard Lewis's work *The Roots of Muslim Rage*. Especially, the notion that civilisations are monolithic and homogeneous, as well as the unchanging nature of the dichotomy between us and them, can be traced back to Lewis. E. Said was critical of Huntington's thesis, arguing that it oversimplifies and distorts the complex histories and cultures of the regions under discussion. In particular, Said argues that Huntington's portrayal of the Islamic civilisation as a monolithic entity is flawed, as it ignores the diversity and internal conflicts within the Islamic world. Another issue is that Huntington perceives Islam, Confucianism, and other civilisations as separate and prone to conflict. Said further criticises Huntington's depiction of the West as a superior civilisation, asserting that it reflects a narrow and biased perspective. Overall, Said argues that Huntington's thesis represents a dangerous and reductionist way of understanding international relations, one that can contribute to hostility and conflict between different cultures. At best, it can be seen as an attempt to manage a conflict without trying to resolve it.

Conclusions

It seems that in contemporary Europe, we are experiencing what some authors call the limitations of the liberal state. Specifically, we can observe the paradoxical utilisation of the liberal norms for exclusionary purposes. Moreover, the influence of the identity politics and policymaking seems to exceed and transform the limits of the liberal democratic state in Europe (Adamson *et al.*, 2011). Europe appears to be deploying, at an increasing rate, liberal norms as boundary markers, that demarcate the symbolic borders of a state (Adamson *et al.*, 2011). In some cases, these even replace or supplement other boundary markers, such as ethnic or civic nationalism, and contribute to shaping migration and integration policies in European states.

Framings, politics, and narratives also influence migration governance. Migration has become one of the most politicized issues in European and national discussions. The emphasis on migration narratives dominated the political sphere, media outlets, and social media. It influenced public opinion and legitimized exclusionary policies, profoundly influencing policymaking, politics, and knowledge production/academic debates (Sahin-Mencütek, 2020).

The current emergence and constant rise of the phenomenon of post-truth has become another challenge for the EU (Dompablo, 2023). This phenomenon uses an upsurge of emotionality over reason and facts and is linked to the crisis of liberal democracy and populism. Hence, manipulates public opinion (for example, through disinformation and fake news) to the constructed idea of migrants and refugees as an enemy (by using prejudice, etc.). This then results in the distorted perception of migration, the use of cultural frames, and other exclusionary practices.

Currently, the instability of the MENA region and the Syrian conflict does not imply that the migration and refugee flows will reduce in the following years, which stresses the need for effective policies concerning the failed Dublin system (Ferreira, 2016a). As was already demonstrated, restrictive policies cannot stop irregular migration

and do not help with the internal security of the EU (Völkel, 2017). Border control is indeed essential; however, there is also a need for other tools, such as agreements between countries of origin and transit, easier and more efficient legal integration processes, speed the process of asylum requests, and speed up the process of member state coordination and a refugee policy reliant on human rights for burden-sharing and relocation (Estevens, 2018).

Overall, the EU is facing several challenges, be it the need for new migration and asylum policies, the challenges of the illiberal democracy, populism, intensified rise in the backlash against multiculturalism, as well as the anti-immigrant sentiments. The question is: Do we really want a clash of civilisations? And does this mindset inevitably lead to a resurgence of nationalism? Also, both Huntington's Europe and current Europe are too close to the idea that the civilised world has the right to civilise others. In other words, the concept of a "cultural destiny" and other redeeming ideas to support power and conquest are too akin to the colonial and imperial ideology.

Currently, the liberal norms are still standing. However, several of them are being challenged. Suppose the rise of populism, disinformation, personalisation politics, and silent citizenship (caused by the broken and dated social contract) continues. In that case, the support of European integration (and the EU as an organisation) by the citizens of the Member States will drastically decrease.

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