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THE SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION POLICY IN THE EU: THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND IT FROM THE 1970S UNTIL RECENT DAYS

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1.   Introduction

Migration has entered the EU security agenda in the last decades but has quickly become a leading concern and a cardinal policy domain. Being progressively constructed as a critical threat to the wellbeing, identity and security of European states and societies, migration has consequently been the target of several policies and counter-actions by the EU aimed at reducing its associated risks. In other words, the EU has been the locus of discourses but also practices that have gradually contributed to securitise the issue across its Member States (Karamanidou, 2015: 37). In this regard, while many scholars have focused their researches on the process through which the securitisation of migration policy by the EU has materialised (the how), far fewer studies have dealt with the root causes that led to it, namely, why this development occurred. To contribute to filling this gap, the essay aims to answer the research

question "Why has migration policy been securitised in the EU?" and to foster further research in this field. Accordingly, the essay will firstly introduce in its general terms the theory of securitisation, which will be evaluated based on the existent literature and the own critical interpretation of the author. Secondly, in the light of a revisited or extended definition of such theory, some feasible reasons that led migration policy to be securitised in the EU context will be analytically assessed. In this respect, rather than focusing on the mere description of the process, the analysis will consider major historical occurrences as the driving forces of such development that, according to this reasoning, informally began in the 70s. Lastly, some concluding remarks and feasible scenarios for stimulating further research will follow.

2.   Main Body

2.1 Revisiting Securitisation Theory

Securitisation theory has become an increasingly popular approach in the understanding of several contemporary security issues, playing a key role in the early development of critical security studies. The concept was firstly introduced in the 90s by the Copenhagen School and its main representative Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. According to these theorists, securitisation refers to the process of presenting an issue in security terms, depicting it as an existential threat (Buzan & Hansen, 2009: 214). In other words, securitisation is the discursive process or 'speech act' through which an issue is dramatized and presented as a threat of supreme priority (Buzan et al. 1998: 26). By labelling it as a security threat the securitising entrepreneur moves the issue out of regular politics and into the security sphere. This shift, in turn, when acknowledged by the relevant constituency or audience, enables emergency measures and the suspension of 'normal politics' to face it (Mcdonald, 2008: 567), as also illustrated by the graph.

Figure 1. Issue scale, from Buzan et al. (1998:23).

The securitisation theory presents some critical shortcomings. One of the most prominent is envisaged by the Paris School and Didier Bigo (2002: 73), who argues that the conceptualisation of securitisation through discourses of emergency fails to account for the bureaucratic routines that are continuous rather than exceptional. In effect, an exclusive focus on language excludes "forms of bureaucratic practices or physical actions that do not merely follow from securitising 'speech acts' but are part of the process through which meanings of security are communicated and security itself constructed" (Mcdonald, 2008: 569). In this respect, according to Karamanidou (2015: 39), securitisation also encompasses a range of social practices of controlling and governing populations, which reflect to some extent Foucault's concept of governmentality: namely a form of governance which relies on bureaucratic and technological devices to govern and control society.

It may be generally argued that securitisation emerges from a variety of different levels: from speech acts legitimizing exceptional policies up to the routinized practices of security professionals and the application of governmentality techniques. However, both the analytical frameworks discussed tend to underestimate a crucial dimension. Although discourses and practices are undoubtedly the central elements of a securitisation process, historical events as driving forces that lead and grant success to these processes should not be neglected. In effect, as recognized by Mcdonald (2008: 573), "those interested in the construction of security must pay attention to the social, political and historical contexts in which particular discourses [or practices] of security become possible". I strongly believe that major historical events and circumstances are the driving forces and probably even the main constitutive elements behind the speech acts and practices that follow them. In this sense, securitisation is maybe even justifiable to the audience and successful in the implementation principally due to specific

occurrences. In other words, the analysis of why a particular policy or issue is securitised seems crucial. The driving forces behind securitisation are, accordingly, essential to better grasp how the process develops and evolves consequently. Notwithstanding, focusing on a specific historical period or mega-event could be erroneous. In effect, issues can come to be viewed as security threats over an extended period of time (Mcdonald 2008: 576). In this regard, as stated by Léonard (2010: 238), securitisation is a diffuse and long-term process that "requires regular 'positive reinforcements', such as the regular enactment of securitising practices". In this sense, the essay will address some well-known historical facts and occurrences as 'positive reinforcements' that bolstered and intensified the securitisation of the migration policy in the EU over the years.

2.2 The Securitisation of Migration Policy in the EU

The securitisation of migration policy in the EU will be analysed in the light of the several historical mega-events that, in this view, contributed to made the process mainstreamed and its development through speech acts and practices 'successful'. The events will be differentiated into three different main historical periods: the 70s, the 80s and 90s, and the 2000s. The aim is to explain how the securitisation process developed through time and was 'positively reinforced' over the years by specific occurrences, that in turn fostered the adoption of discourses and practices by the EU.

Securitisation of Migration in the 70s: The End of the Bretton Woods System and The Oil Crisis

In the period after the Second World War, Western Europe was overall economically prosperous and international migration was generally viewed positively because of its economic benefits (Van

Mol & de Valk, 2016: 33). In other words, it can be asserted that in the 1950s and 1960s immigrants were seen to a large extent as an extra workforce in most West European countries (Huysmans, 2000: 753). This is also recognized by Karamanidou (2015: 40), who affirms that post-WWII migration in western European countries was a source of much-needed labour to help their economic development.

However, the beneficial relationship did not last long. Although the securitisation of migration policy by the EU is rarely analysed in such terms and so far in time, the first stimulus and crucial explanation that opened the way to its development in the following decades is probably traceable back to the early 1970s. In this respect, two major driving forces probably played a crucial role in shaping an adverse view of migrants in insecurity terms. Firstly, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in 1971, which affected dramatically also the countries of the European Economic Community that had previously benefitted from it. The fragmentation and volatility of currencies, the enormous instability of exchange rates, a decline of investments and the increase of unemployment are just some of the disastrous implications that the end of this system had on the international and European economy.

The situation was further aggravated by the oil crisis of 1973 that also had considerable and damaging impacts on the economic landscape of European countries. The crisis gave impetus to economic restructuring, therefore sharply reducing the need for labour and several EU countries started invoking a migration limitation (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016: 35). Furthermore and most relevantly, "increasing unemployment levels due to the economic recession fuelled hostility, racism, and xenophobia towards certain groups of resident migrants" (p.35). This is confirmed by Huysmans (2000: 754), who affirms that the economic downturn of the 1970s triggered the intensification of concerns around social conflicts and integration. In effect, "even a country willing to accept immigrants when its economy is booming is more likely to close its doors in a recession" (Weiner, 1993: 105). In other words, when the welfare

system is dominantly portrayed as unsustainable in the short term it is common to "portray immigrants, asylum-seekers and refugees as a serious threat to the survival of the socio-economic system" (Huysmans, 2006: 79). This is exactly the logic that progressively started to materialize in the 70s and probably the first crucial reason why the securitisation of migration policy in the EU began to move its first 'informal' steps.

Securitisation of Migration in the 80s and 90s: The Schengen Agreement in the Context of the Cold War End

The economic crisis of the 70s informally gave the way to the framing in security terms by several EU countries of the phenomenon of migration. However, the official outset of the securitisation of this policy in the EU context is formally traceable to 1985, when five Member States of the Union signed the Schengen Agreement on the gradual abolition of checks at their common borders, followed by the Convention implementing that Agreement in 1990 (European Commission, n.d.).
The Schengen arrangement of 1985, by removing internal borders, established the free movement of the people within the system while laying the foundations for a harmonization of the Member States in the understanding and management of immigration (Sansus et al., 2020: 64). However, abolishing internal border controls and facilitating transnational flows of goods, capital, services and people was at once inextricably seen as an enormous challenge for those same countries (Huysmans, 2006: 69). In other words, the downgrading of internal border control was quickly linked to the necessity of strengthening external border controls by the European Community to guarantee the control of who and what could legitimately enter the space of free movement (p.69). In this perspective, the securitisation of migration can be seen as a response to the abolition of internal borders among states joining the Schengen zone and as a trade-off between internal security and free movement (Karamanidou, 2015: 41).

During those same years, the collapse of the Iron Curtain, the end of the Cold War and the opening of the borders of Eastern Europe induced new migration flows towards Europe (Van Mol & de Valk, 2016: 37). In this respect, Léonard (2010: 234) even argues that it is exactly following these occurrences that migration flows became an increasingly contentious issue in Europe, leading European states to take various measures to curb the number of migrants and to strengthen border controls. The claim, as recognized by Weiner (1993: 92), is based on the fact that with the end of the Cold War a resurgence of violent secessionist movements and conflicts created un-precedent refugee flows. However, while during the Cold War years the refugee movements could be used as ideological tools in proxy wars and instruments in the anti-communist propaganda, from the 1990s onwards the refugees lost their ideological or geopolitical value and came to be seen as international threats (Ihlamur-Öner, 2019: 207).

Both the driving forces analysed had a profound impact in the securitising discourses and also on the policies adopted by the EU in this field those years. In this regard, the introduction of the Third Pillar on Justice and Home Affairs in the Maastricht Treaty (1993), the creation of Europol (1999), the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice and the incorporation of the Schengen Agreements in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), along with the Tampere European Council (1999) and the creation of European databases and data-exchange systems such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) in 1990 and Eurodac (2000) are among the most visible examples of the securitisation of the migration policy in the EU and an evident illustration of the spill-over of the internal market into an internal security field.

Securitisation of Migration in the 2000s

Starting from the 2000s, several major driving forces could be seen as 'positive reinforcements' and amplifiers of the securitisation process underwent by the EU migration policy. These can be generally classified according to the three principles envisaged by

Huysmans (2006), that analysed exactly the basis through which the EU migration policy has been securitised. These criteria are cultural security, the crisis of the welfare system (or economic security) and internal security.

As regards the first category, a crucial data is 2004. In this year EU experienced what has been defined by Léonard (2010: 234) as the "big bang' enlargement". In this context, some concerns were raised about the plausible inability of the future Member States to effectively manage the new external borders of the EU. From such a viewpoint, strengthening cooperation amongst Member States on border controls was seen as the most effective way to address the perceived lack of border control capabilities of the future EU Member States and their difficulties to meet the border control standards (p.234).

In terms of economic in-security, the Euro-crisis that spread after the Financial Crisis of 2008 ravaged socially and economically several EU Member States (Sansus et al., 2020: 65). The European Member States and the EU in itself, also due to it, found themselves unprepared to manage properly the refugee crisis that later on emerged (p.66). According to this view, the fear of migrants must be understood in a certain context of insecurity that the Europeans faced exactly after the economic crisis (p.72). As explained also in the context of the 70s economic crisis, a high rate of unemployment in some states and the fear provoked by the lack of opportunities in the labour market generated profound resentment against migrants.

For what concerns internal security, the violent attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 had a spill-over psychological effect and reinforced the framework associating internal in-security to asylum and immigration (Huysmans, 2006: 68). The same fallouts are attributable to the terrorist attacks that occurred during the following years on the European Member States' soil. Just to name a few, the terrorist attacks of Madrid (2004) and London (2005) "renewed concerns over the ability of the EU to control its common

external borders" (Ceccorulli & Lucarelli, 2018: 164). As a consequence, the Hague Programme of 2004, delivered exactly after the terrorist attacks in Madrid, claimed that "in the light of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and in Madrid on 11 March 2004, [...] citizens of Europe rightly expect the European Union [...] to take a more effective approach to cross-border problems such as illegal migration, [...] and terrorism" (European Council, 2005: 1). Accordingly, FRONTEX started its activities in 2005 and gradually assumed an increasing relevance for a set of variegated JHA policies. FRONTEX, "as an independent agency specifically created for enhancing the border control regime of the EU, is an example of how securitisation practices have become normalised" (Karamanidou, 2015: 45).

The 'migration-terrorism nexus' has gained further political momentum in the last decade, particularly following the growing instability in the Middle East and North Africa region and the refugee flows that followed the Arab Spring of 2011 (Ihlamur-Öner, 2019: 196). These events were driving forces for the development of a comprehensive EU migration policy, that came exactly in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring. It was manifest in the new Global Approach to Migration and Mobility of 2011, where is claimed that "migration is now firmly at the top of the European Union's political agenda" (European Commission, 2011: 2). Furthermore, as recognized by Ceccorulli & Lucarelli (2018: 164-165), the most recent developments such as the tragic deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea of the last years, the refugee crisis, the worsening of the Syrian conflict and the flow of refugees that it produced via the Balkan route since 2015, to name just a few, have as a whole contributed and further amplified the increasing reliance on the emergency language in public debates when dealing with migration.

3.   Conclusion

Starting from the 70s, migration has progressively become a critical policy domain for the EU and its security agenda. The essay critically analysed this development arguing that mega-historical events are the major driving forces that led and granted success to discourses and practices of securitisation of this issue in the EU context over the years. According to this perspective, while the economic crisis of the 70s informally gave the way to the framing in (in)-security terms of migration, the official outset of the securitisation of this policy is formally traceable to the 1985 Schengen Agreement, that, in the context of the end of the Cold War, had profound impacts in the securitising discourses and also on the policies adopted by the EU in those years. Starting from the 2000s, several major driving forces have been analysed as 'positive reinforcements' and amplifiers of the securitisation process underwent by the migration policy: the EU enlargement, the Euro-crisis, the several terrorist attacks, along with the Arab Spring of 2011 and the subsequent refugee flows are just some of them. The European Union is at a crucial crossroads that entails determining which kind of external actor it is and will be in the future. As suggested by Ceccorulli & Lucarelli (2018: 162) the choice is between being an inward-looking entity committed to 'securing' its homeland; or starting effectively to consider the security and rights of migrants as equally relevant to the values it upholds and the external image it aims to project. The issue is analysed by the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, which envisages two security imperatives as inextricable: border protection and the duty to avert further loss of lives by migrants (European Commission, 2015: 2). Nothing has so far really changed, but this policy and the ones that followed it leave some concrete hopes for the future.

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