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## **The Justification of Illegal Pushbacks at the EU's External Borders: Beyond the "General (In)securitized Context" Understanding of the (In)securitization of Migrants in EU Politics**

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### **Citation**

Leander Djerf, C. (2022). *The Justification of Illegal Pushbacks at the EU's External Borders: Beyond the "General (In)securitized Context" Understanding of the (In)securitization of Migrants in EU Politics.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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**The Justification of Illegal Pushbacks at the EU's External Borders**  
Beyond the “General (In)securitized Context” Understanding of the (In)securitization  
of Migrants in EU Politics



**Master's Thesis - MSc Political Science: Political Legitimacy and Justice**

**Faculty of Social Sciences, Leiden University**

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**Date:** 13th of June 2021

**Word Count:** 9934

## **Abstract**

Thousands of migrants trying to enter the EU are subjected to illegal pushbacks at the hands of the border protection functions of individual EU states. (In)securitization theory suggests that these illegal pushbacks warrant the need for political justification. Yet the primary current academic literature regarding the (in)securitization of migrants in the EU does not even recognize that the pushbacks are taking place. This research project first offers an altered conception of (in)securitization that can better account for the illegal practices taking place. This conception of (in)securitization emphasizes a process-centric approach to the concept's application that focuses on both the actual (in)securitization attempts by actors and their motives, and the actual practices taken by border control agents. This is in contrast to the primary usage of (in)securitization that instead is restricted to establishing an abstractly conceived *general (in)securitized context*. Secondly, the reconceptualization is applied to the three cases where the most significant number of pushbacks are taking place; Romania, Hungary and Croatia. The project's findings suggest that (in)securitization theory must take a step back and align more closely with its original conception, that emphasized specific political motivations, to better capture the actual extraordinary practices that need political justification.

## **1. Introduction**

Thousands of migrants looking to enter the European Union (EU) via the EU's external land borders are being illegally pushed back by the border protections services of individual EU states (DRC, 2022, Jan. 25). This empirical observation spurred this research project. Pushbacks violate the prohibition of collective expulsions in the European Convention on Human Rights as well as other EU laws (ECCHR, n.d.), and Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Noll, 2021, Oct. 7; UN, n.d.). Other abuses of rights such as physical and sexual violence, harassment, extortion, destruction of property, theft and forced separation of families are also regularly part of the border guards' practices (DRC, 2022, Jan. 25). The human rights violations are occurring so consistently in some places that various human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) have suggested that the practices are being systematically implemented as de facto tools by various state border control authorities (Amnesty Int, 2021, Oct. 7; DRC, 2022, Jan. 25; HRW, 2020, Oct. 29). The EU has various means to limit or even prevent these illegal pushbacks carried out by individual EU states, yet that political power is not being substantially exercised. The illegal pushbacks not only continue, but are increasing. I explain this relative non-protest and non-intervention by emphasizing the role of individual EU states in the process of (in)securitizing migrants. The project first develops a theoretical framework by adjusting the current usage of (in)securitization theory, in order to better explain how these illegal practices could come to be justified by the individual states. Then a multiple case study of Romania, Hungary and Croatia is presented to test the theoretical framework. The findings suggest that individual state representatives do (in)securitize migrants with the specific motive to justify illegal pushbacks.

## 2. Literature Review

There are two research areas that this research project responds to: the conceptualization of (in)securitization theory, and more specifically the (in)securitization of migrants in the EU.

### 2.1 (In)securitization Theory

(In)securitization theory stems from a constructivist perspective on security studies, first spurred by Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde (1998). Originally, an (in)securitizing act was conceptualized to frame a political question which is not an intrinsically existential threat into one that becomes existential. In turn, the (in)securitizing actor (the political actor that framed the referent object) may then deploy extraordinary measures against the (in)securitized referent object. These extraordinary measures would be protested by an audience that holds political power over the (in)securitizing actor unless the (in)securitization attempt was successful - the audience's relationship with the (in)securitizing actor must be power-laden (Balzacq, 2005, p. 179; Buzan et al., p. 5). (In)securitization in layman's terms is when a political actor uses speech acts to frame a political question as far more threatening to an audience than it actually is, in order to then employ countermeasures otherwise not politically available to them. An illustrative example of the (in)securitization process is George W. Bush's convincing of the US population that Saddam Hussein was in possession of nuclear weapons (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 495). In this example there is an explicitly utilized discourse - Hussein's supposed possession of nuclear arms. There is a new extraordinary countermeasure, the invasion of Iraq. And finally, there is an audience that holds political leverage against the (in)securitizing actor, the US population, that does not protest. (In)securitization theory suggests that without the successful (in)securitization, the full-scale invasion would not have been available to the US government without substantial (and *substantive*) protests. It is vital to (in)securitization to distinguish what non-protest is.

Non-protest is the lack of *substantive* protests, rather than a lack of protests altogether. In the example used there were *unsubstantial* protests against the invasion. But there were no protests *substantive* enough to put an end to the extraordinary means, thus it is labelled successful (in)securitization.

The original conception, as shown above, emphasizes a process-centric (in)securitization process, and will be referred to as the *thick description* of (in)securitization. The primary academic usage of (in)securitization theory does not adhere to this process-centric conception. Rather, the theory is now instead understood as a process of general discourse construction by an agglomeration of loosely understood political actors - what Ceccorulli (2010) refers to as a security narrative leading to consequent security governance. The (in)securitized narrative stems from a variety of sources rather than specific utterances; from regional and sub-regional officials to newspaper discourse and the actual actions of professionals responding to the political referent object (Ceccorulli, p. 491). Conceived in this way, (in)securitization does not hinge on framing an existential threat, rather it establishes a *general (in)securitized context*. This dominant conception will be referred to as the *thin description* of (in)securitization. The *thin description* is less concretely identifiable and thus creates difficulties in the analysis of actual processes. Wæver (The Open University, 2014, Oct. 3) disagrees with the *thin description*, as he suggests that the purpose of (in)securitization theory is to deconstruct specific motives by actors, rather than to analyse general societal changes. Focusing on the *thin description* instead of the *thick description* necessitates a more general outlook, and thus the fact that (in)securitization may be intentionally initiated by actors to further specific motives may be missed. Following this logic, I will show how the usage of the *thin description* has led to gaps in the literature

regarding illegal pushbacks of migrants in the (in)securitization of migrants in the EU literature.

## 2.2 *(In)securitization of Migrants in the EU*

I suggest that the application of (in)securitization theory in the context of migration to the EU can be categorized by two central aspects of the theory; the context in which the (in)securitizing move takes place, and the extraordinary measures that are sought to be justified. The context where the (in)securitizing move takes place is made up of three categories: the *macro-level* (the EU), the *meso-level* (individual EU states) and the *micro-level* (smaller administrative units and/or actual practices within individual states). This categorization is appropriate because the majority of scholars in (in)securitization work within one of the three above-mentioned contexts. The application of (in)securitization at the *macro-level* explores the EU as an imagined collective actor in policymaking and legislative processes and/or as a loosely interpreted theatre of sorts where (in)securitization takes place. This application is coherent with the *thin description* of (in)securitization theory as described in the previous section, as an imagined collective actor cannot make identifiable (in)securitizing moves, rather it may establish a *general (in)securitized context*. The *meso-* and *micro-level* contexts are more coherent with the *thick description* of (in)securitization because these contexts allow for analysis of actual utterances and/or practices. (In)securitizing actors are identifiable and actual practices analysable. Next, I suggest that the extraordinary measures deployed may be divided into two categories: *legal-policy* measures, where extraordinary actions are still confined by the legal processes of the actor, and *illegal-practice* measures, actions that are not only extraordinary but also illegally utilized. Apart from these categorizations that are applied to trends in the literature, it should be noted

that the (in)securitized referent object stays unchanged throughout the literature - migrants attempting to or already entering the EU.

The most dominant perspective in the literature explores (in)securitization at the *macro-level* and treats the EU as the (in)securitizing actor. One author subscribing to this logic is Dupont (2019), who describes it as an “understanding of the EU as an imagined collective agent of securitization over time” (p. 369). In these articles, the (in)securitizing attempts and the extraordinary measures deployed are not specified (see also: Baele & Sterck, 2015; Baker-Beall, 2019; Ceccorulli, 2019; Kaunert & Léonard, 2021; Lucarelli, 2019 & Moreno-Lax, 2018). Rather, a *general (in)securitized context* is described, accompanied by a loosely defined collection of *legal-policy* measures that either make migration more difficult, or outright block migrants. None of the articles using a *thin description* of (in)securitization include mention of the *illegal-practice* measures that take place on EU external borders. This oversight of the most extreme extraordinary measures being deployed runs the risk of academically (de)securitizing the topic, presenting it as less threatening than it actually is. The literature shows that the use of the *thin description* in the *macro-level* of analysis leads to missing the *illegal-practice* measures actually occurring. These articles also do not put any emphasis on potential protests (whether *substantive* or not) and/or non-protests. The current paradigm of (in)securitization of migrants in the EU only identifies a *general (in)securitized context*. Initial (in)securitization attempts are not identified, extraordinary measures are not specified, and the measures’ need for legitimation is not a focus point. Thus, this application is more akin to the analysis of general societal changes that Wæver suggests and thus lacks the ability to explain specific motives (The Open University, 2014, Oct. 3).

The use of a *thick description* at the *meso-* or *micro-level* is also present in the literature, albeit to a lesser extent. Authors like Bigo (2014) and Skleparis (2016) focus on security professionals at the *micro-level* and how their actual practices (in)securitize the migrants. This conception still does not include all processes that shape the *thick description*, such as motives or specific (in)securitization attempts, since the practices shape the (in)securitization rather than discursive utterances. These analyses lack mention of structural forces, such as the need for legitimation, past the individual actions of border professionals, and speak only of the normalization of illegal activities. Yet, because of the focus on actual practices, there is a notion of *illegal-practice* measures deployed. Skleparis (2016) makes these findings explicit and emphasizes the illegal practices taking place on EU borders, referring to them as “illiberal practices of liberal regimes” (p. 92). Referring to illegal human rights offences as “illiberal practices” may again work to (de)securitize the topic, but at least there is some emphasis on the practices. The authors that instead adhere to the *meso-level* of analysis (see e.g., Bello, 2020, Rizova, 2019 & Thorleifsson, 2017) have included implications from both the *thin-* and *thick descriptions*, although they do not establish a full (in)securitization process picture. Rizova (2019) and Thorleifsson (2017) focus on individual EU states, notably Hungary, and while Rizova does acknowledge the reports of Human Rights Watch (p. 83), there is no explicit indication of the need to make these extraordinary measures legitimate. Bello (2020) is the closest to the inclusion of both structural *thin description* and process-focused *thick description* explanation in their article structured as a meta-analysis of the topic. The *illegal-practice* measures are still not mentioned, as the meta-analysis is primarily focused on what I have identified as *macro-* and *meso-level* scopes. Nonetheless, this project adheres to a similar logic of convergence between the levels of analysis. As such, I recognize that the levels of analysis necessarily interact structurally.

### **3. Hypothesis and Research Questions**

The literature review presents a central hypothesis: (in)securitization theory suggests that the presence of *illegal-practice* measures against migrants should constitute the need for justification by an (in)securitizing actor towards an audience that holds political power over the (in)securitizing actor. I will first suggest an altered conceptualization of (in)securitization theory to the topic in the theoretical justification section. Then that approach will be applied to three case studies in the analysis.

#### *3.1 Research Questions*

The first research question, handled in the theoretical justification section is: **(1)** *How can (in)securitization theory be conceptualized to better capture the justification of unconventional illegal measures taken by political officials?* From this initial conceptual question, the analysis seeks to answer: **(2)** *How do individual EU state representatives (in)securitize migrants in the EU?*

### **4. Theoretical Justification**

The primary perspective on (in)securitization of migrants in the EU, which utilizes a *thin description* at the *macro-level* of analysis, misses details related to both actual utterances and actual practices. Less dominant perspectives in the literature - that explore the topic using a in either the *meso-* or *micro-level* of analysis - instead neglect exploring some of the integral structural forces and dynamics, such as the need for a power-laden relationship between the (in)securitizing actor and the audience. As such, most articles establish a *general (in)securitized context*, and the articles that instead explore explicit (in)securitization attempts within individual states or actual practices are limited to only analyzing the process partially. Rather than establish a full (in)securitization process, these articles either demonstrate that

there is a constructed context that is being actively and has been (in)securitized. Alternatively, the articles that work within the *meso-* and/or *micro-level* instead only focus on the extraordinary measures as independent practices. I want to emphasize that I do not explicitly disagree with either of these perspectives, the contextualization is important. So is the acknowledgement of individual practices by border guards. But neither of these perspectives explains that *illegal-practice measures* are being used systematically on the EU border by state border protection functions. One perspective (*thin description macro-level*) neglects the practices altogether, and the other perspective (*thick description meso- and micro-level*) does not explain the systematic regularity of the *illegal-practice* pushbacks.

Assumptions that are integral to (in)securitization theory's initial conception may explain these shortcomings. At its core, (in)securitization is a framing method to justify an extraordinary action. Said action is assumed to be utilized by the (in)securitizing actor. It is in this dynamic, I believe, that leads both perspectives in the literature to fail to explain the systematic nature of the *illegal-practice* measures. The authors that work with the *thin description macro-level* of analysis (Baele & Sterck, 2015; Baker-Beall, 2019; Ceccorulli, 2019; Dupont, 2019; Kaunert & Léonard, 2021; Lucarelli, 2019 & Moreno-Lax, 2018) do not specify extraordinary actions, rather they allude towards that the *general (in)securitized context* contributes to a more difficult situation for migrants through EU-level *legal-policy* measures. This understanding is coherent with the core logic of (in)securitization, as these general *legal-policy* measures are an action that is actually available to the EU when understood as a collective (in)securitizing agent. It is an action that suggests the need for justification in relation to the EU constituency, thus necessitating (in)securitization. In this understanding, *legal-policy* measures are actually employable. Systematic *illegal-practice* pushbacks by national border control functions are not an option that could be deployed by

the EU. That extraordinary measure is illegal in the EU, and thus not actually deployable. As such, the *thin description macro-level* analyses have the capacity to explain the general direction of discourse regarding migrants.

Meanwhile, the way that *thick description meso- and micro-level* is applied to analyses instead focuses on either specific utterances or actual practices but fails to acknowledge many other integral aspects of (in)securitization. It is by the recognition of the shortcomings of both descriptions, and the merging of what explanatory power either conceptualization has, that the systematic pushbacks may be explained. The *illegal-practice* measures are being systematically utilized by border protection governmental functions of the individual EU states (*meso-level*). The border guards (*micro-level*) are an extension of these state functions, and thus their actions are also an actually deployable option to the individual EU state as an (in)securitizing actor. So, to better capture the dynamics that result in, or at least foster (claims of causality in non-positivistically conceived process-tracing are lacklustre) the *illegal-practice* measures, utilization of the *thick description* with an emphasis on the whole process is appropriate. Recognizing all the essential dynamics outlined in the literature review and theoretical justification so far, the *thick description* should facilitate the exploration of the initial (in)securitization attempt at the *meso-level* (and by extension also the *micro-level* practices) towards the audience that holds political leverage to protest - the EU. The *illegal-practice* measures are actually available to individual EU states. The practices are also in need of legitimation and justification towards the EU as an imagined collective audience, as the measures are extraordinary in their illegality, and as the EU has both political and legal endowment to stop the actions.

## 5. Research Methodology

### 5.1 Research Design and Operationalization

The empirical context and the utilization of a process focused *thick description* of (in)securitization lends itself to a process-tracing discourse analysis research methodology. The process tracing logic is borrowed from Floyd (2016) and Guzzini's (2011) reconceptualization of (in)securitization theory into a non-positivistic, measurable concept. Guzzini (2011) describes their reconceptualization as one that interprets (in)securitization theory as relying on de facto causal mechanisms that are "non-positivistically conceived" (Guzzini, p. 329). An (in)securitization attempt must come before the utilization of an extraordinary action to make non-positivistic claims of "causality", or at least linkages. This sensitivity to time is coherent with the logic of sequences in regard to process-tracing as described by Collier (2011, p. 823). Importantly, process-tracing leads to the creation of a narrative that can paint a picture of the (in)securitization process, based on the perceived mechanisms (Beach, 2016, p. 471). The narrative is created using instances of both discourse and content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 11). The discourse analysis aspect is necessary because of the content of (in)securitization attempts; the utterances must be interpreted by the researcher (Balzacq, 2008, p. 95). The utterance must be regarded as an (in)securitization attempt or not - is the referent object framed unjustly as an existential threat, but is not actually one? This distinction is interpretative, as an (in)securitizing actor will not declare that they have unjustly (in)securitized the referent object.

After the (in)securitization attempt the rest of the narrative is constructed by a combination of further discourse and content analysis. The extraordinary measure must be deemed extraordinary - in this case, it is extraordinary because it is illegal. The extraordinary measure is then made legitimate by non-protest by the audience - the absence of *substantive* protests.

The existence or non-existence of *substantive* protests in the research is largely content analysis. A *substantive* protest is one where the audience actually influences the newly deployed extraordinary actions of the (in)securitizing actor. If there are no *substantive* protests, then the (in)securitization is deemed successful. With these research methodology dynamics in mind, as well as my readaptation of the theory, the methodology may be operationalized. It relies on three main steps; **(1)** the identification of an utterance that (in)securitizes the referent object, thus making it susceptible to extraordinary measures (the **(in)securitizing move**). Without this initial (in)securitization effort, the process-tracing cannot be initiated. **(2)** An elevated change in the measures deployed against the referent object (the **extraordinary action**) by the (in)securitizing actor. Again, in this context, the actions are extraordinary because they are illegal. Finally, **(3)** the extraordinary action is not *substantively* protested by the audience (the **legitimation**). There may be *unsubstantial* protests that do not change the (in)securitizing actors implemented extraordinary action. This form of protest that lacks results is not deemed *substantive* and is thus also rendered a form of non-protest.

## 5.2 *Analysable Content*

The most integral aspect of the research is the initial utterance. The material that is considered analysable are utterances that come from official governmental functions of the individual EU state that may then actually deploy the extraordinary measure. The utterance must also reach the audience (the EU), and thus bodies of government that deal with the EU explicitly are considered. These include primarily the foreign ministry or public discourse utterances of the state's leader. It should be noted that the actual practices take place at the *micro-level*, but it is implied that they are systematically utilized by the *meso-level*. It is also from the *meso-level* that the audience can reliably be reached. There are other

(in)securitization attempts taking place in the general discourse, but to claim a connection between the (in)securitizing actor's utterance and the reception of the (in)securitizing move by the audience, this specificity is necessary. It allows claims of actual attempted (in)securitization, which Wæver suggests gets lost in a more general discourse (The Open University, 2014, Oct. 3). He suggests that you cannot speak of a "nation's" (in)securitizing utterances, rather it is someone who speaks on behalf of the nation. To give an example, a social worker for a government institution in a border town may also utter (in)securitizing discourse. But it could not be reliably claimed that various EU functions would be aware of these utterances.

(In)securitization attempts will not only be limited to coming from a stately function but one that is high profile and as such demonstrably (active interactions occur) visible to the EU. The utterances must inaccurately portray migrants as an existential threat to the population, or the state itself. This process often relies on populist rhetoric (Müller, 2022; Rumelili, 2021; Wojczewski, 2020), but specific angles will be more intricately expanded upon in the analysis itself. Lastly, as process-tracing is being used, the exact time period for the context must be chosen. Although there have been periods of intensified migration into the EU prior to what is generally referred to as the "European migrant crisis" (Casella Colombeau, 2020), its onset presents a significant increase in importance in EU politics (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Thus, the research period is constrained to the influx of migration in 2015 until the most recent period, the spring of 2022. To briefly summarize, the research will focus on the official press releases of the individual EU state's foreign ministries. As such, the main initial research will be an exhaustive review of all official press releases related to the topic since the onset of the "European migrant crisis" in 2015. Other potential relevant (in)securitization attempts, such as utterances by relevant heads of state, will be a second angle of research.

## **6. Case Selection**

The case selection is based on the states that have a significant number of *illegal-practice* measures against migrants reported by human rights organizations. According to a recent aggregate report published by the DRC, the three EU states with the most regular pushbacks are Croatia, Hungary and Romania (DRC, 2021, Dec. 16). The logic outlined in the theoretical justification suggests that these three cases would be most in need of legitimizing their *illegal-practice* measures. There are two main differences between the cases that should be noted. The first is that there is a significant variation in reported pushbacks. For example, the DRC reported 4541 pushbacks between July and November 2021 in Croatia, while the same period saw 592 pushbacks in Romania, and 522 in Hungary (DRC, 2021, Dec. 16). The second consideration is the nature of the states' borders in relation to the EU. All three states do constitute external borders of the EU; all three share a border with Serbia, Croatia borders Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Montenegro, and Romania borders both Ukraine and Moldova. However, it is only Hungary of the three chosen states that is part of the Schengen Area. This means that freedom of movement from both Croatia and Romania into other EU states is more restricted. The implications of both these aspects will be discussed after the analysis.

## **7. Analysis**

### ***7.1 The Romanian Case***

The Romanian case is both the case that has had the least number of *illegal-practice* pushbacks reported as well as the case with the least explicit (in)securitization attempts. In terms of (in)securitization discourses, the Romanian narrative shifted gradually with the increase of migrants. First, it was emphasized that appropriate practices according to the rule of law should be exercised. The narrative then shifted to that EU states should be judged by

their actual “capacity” to tackle the problem. Then with a later significant increase of migrants to Romania specifically, the *meso-level* utterances resorted to a repetition of the migrant-terrorism nexus. Galantino (2022) describes the migration-terrorism nexus as the nonfactual convergence and implied correlation between the two topics (p. 263). Linkages are made to make the referent object an existential threat to Romanian society, but as will be shown this linkage is not as explicit as in the other two cases. As such, Romania presents the weakest example of (in)securitization from the *meso-level* towards the EU.

### 7.1.1 *The Rule of Law, Effective “Capacity” and the Migration-Terrorism Nexus*

Romania only saw a significant increase in migration later than the two other explored states, and the discourses regarding migrants from the *meso-level*, as well as the *illegal-practice* measures at the *micro-level* also reflect this. Neither of the two primary narratives created in Romania up until the increase of migrants to the country towards the end of 2016 and 2017 situates the referent object as an existential threat. Rather, those narratives set the tone for Romania’s relatively (in contrast with the other cases) conservative approach to the *illegal-practice* pushbacks. The first narrative listed was Romanian officials consistently emphasizing the importance of the rule of law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, Apr. 18, May. 19; 2017, May. 19). They also explicitly distanced themselves from the perceived malpractices of the Hungarian government (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, Sep. 15), for example. With the construction of new high-tech security fences along the Bulgarian-Turkish border in 2016 (GDP, 2019, Nov.), however, more migrants started coming through Romania and the discourse shifted. The second primary discourse was still relatively mild in nature. Instead of only focusing on an emphasis on the rule of law, the Romanian government now publicly suggested that EU states should be judged by their supposed effective capacity of

Member States to make commitments in the direction of dealing with the influx (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015, Sep. 9 & Oct. 21; 2017, Jul. 17).

This constructed discourse - considering that the Romanian state does have relatively fewer resources at hand to deal with the referent object than richer EU states - establishes a sense of leeway for the potential *illegal-practice* measures at the *micro-level*. These practices are what a less endowed state like Romania has available, at least that is what is suggested. It is still not explicit (in)securitization, but it establishes a foundation for more clear-cut narratives with the further increase of migrants. The most consistent existential discourse found in the *meso-level* discourse of Romania is the construction and repetition of the migration-terrorism nexus. It is here that the most explicit (in)securitization attempts come forth, with the foreign ministry emphasizing the need to counter extremism, radicalization, and terrorism by migrants. The two topics are consistently grouped, e.g., “*migration, massive flows of refugees, violent extremism*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016, Sep. 18; see also Nov. 24 & Dec. 7). The need for active management of the “*the refugee problem from conflict areas*” and the “*security-level implications in the context of the terrorist-type threats*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, Apr. 5). As will be shown further in the discussion, there is no empirical correlation between increased migration and increased terrorism. Another (in)securitizing utterance suggests that migrants must undergo confessional catholic education to hinder potential extremist tendencies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017, Oct. 30).

### 7.1.2 A Continued State of Lacking Rule of Law

In terms of deployed extraordinary actions, Romania has on the *micro-level* not subscribed to the same rule of law that was initially advocated at the *meso-level*. Rather, a strategy of

self-allowed leeway with the use of *illegal-practice* measures built on the framing of migrants as integrally connected to heightened terrorism has been utilized. Although sources for both attempted illegal border crossings as well as sources for illegal pushbacks are not as abundant in the Romanian case as with the two other cases, there are trends in sources from various publications. Little to no information regarding pushbacks from Romania exists before the escalation of migrants to the country that took place around 2018 (Statista Research Department, 2022, Feb. 1), a period that comes within a year of the more explicit (in)securitization attempts outlined above. In the first half of 2018, there were reports of 140 illegal pushbacks (Strik, 2019, Jan. 21). The other primary research figures available show that Romania saw 331 reported pushbacks between January and April 2021, half of which included additional violence (DRC, 2022, Jan. 25). Another source, KlikAktiv, collected 3700 testimonies of pushbacks from Romania between July 2020 and November 2021 (KlikAktiv, 2021, Dec.). Meanwhile, the original DRC aggregate report that spurred this research project counted 592 pushbacks between January and November 2021. As such, the numbers are not consistent. What is consistent is that there were noticeably fewer *illegal-practice* pushbacks from Romania between 2015 and the start of 2018, during a time when Romania was not a primary refugee route (KlikAktiv, 2021, Dec.). However, the continuous ramping up of migrants after the closure of the Bulgarian-Turkish border (KlikAktiv, 2021, Dec. & Statista Research Department, 2022, Feb. 1), coincide with the dropping of the rule of law narrative. The narrative instead switched to more emphasis on both “effective capacity” and the migration-terrorism nexus, and after these unjust (in)securitization attempts the *illegal-practice* pushbacks have increased. And lately, in 2020 and especially 2021, the pushbacks have increased significantly (DRC, 2022, Jan. 25 & KlikAktiv, 2021, Dec.).

### *7.1.3 The Near-Total Non-Protest against the use of Illegal-Practice Measures*

Within the research period and regarding the specific topic in mind, the Romanian case is less publicized than the two other cases. The *illegal-practice* pushbacks have also been happening for a shorter period of time according to reports. This means that any sort of protest from relevant EU institutions - such as the Ombudsman, Commission or FRONTEX etc. - would be expected later. However, serious reports of pushbacks in Romania started in 2018, and since then there has not even been any explicit acknowledgement of the situation, and along with that also a total lack of reaction from EU institutions. There is no place for interpretation of if a protest is *substantive* or not. There are technically instances of acknowledgement of the malpractices by EU institutions in reference to those *illegal-practice* measures utilized in other EU states, in which it alludes that the practice also takes place elsewhere. But Romania is never explicitly identified as an unjust actor in this regard. In the Romanian case, the legitimization of the *illegal-practice* measures at the *micro-level*, based on the broadly (in)securitized narratives at the *meso-level* by the EU audience comes from a sense of total non-protest.

### *7.2 The Hungarian Case*

The Hungarian case contains the most demonstrably overt (in)securitization attempts, both in regard to the sheer amount of utterances as well as the intensity of said utterances. The most prevalent narrative is the existential threat that migrants pose with reference to the exaggerated consequences of letting them enter. There are also clear populist narratives regarding the “elites” and how, through their support of migrants, “they” are turning against their own people. It is taken so far that an anti-Semitic existential narrative is constructed in the later stages of the various (in)securitization processes, basically saying that it is “the Jew” that is behind the forces trying to force migrants upon Hungary. The migration-terrorism

nexus is also deeply present (Orbán, 2015, Nov. 19 & 2017, Jul. 19; The Prime Minister's Office, 2018, Dec. 13; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019, Oct. 24 & 2020, Feb. 11) but it is overshadowed by the more extreme (in)securitization attempts. The main difference, other than the far more overt, severe, and prevalent nature of Hungary's (in)securitization attempts from the *meso-level*, is the specific source. In the Hungarian case, the majority of the utterances stem from the Prime Minister (PM), Orbán. Hungary presents the strongest example of (in)securitization from the *meso-level* of the researched cases. It is also the case with the most blatant connection between the (in)securitization attempts at the *meso-level* and the implemented *illegal-practice* measures at the *micro-level*.

### *7.2.1 The Migrant Invasion of Europe and the Attack on Christian Values*

The earliest example of (in)securitization by the PM took place at the beginning of September 2015, when he declared that “*if we do not protect our borders, tens of millions of migrants will keep coming*” (Orbán, 2015, Sep. 4). In the same context he presents the *illegal-practice* measure explicitly, saying “*they [the migrants] will not be able to enter Europe - or if they do, they will be sent home*”. The figure presented is exaggerated many times over; migrant and refugee arrivals in Europe peaked at ca 45,000 in October of that year (FRONTEX, n.d.), barely scratching the surface of the supposed tens of millions. The other main (in)securitizing themes also appear early on and continue throughout the researched period. The PM declared in October 2015 that he was defending Europe on “*behalf of the peoples of Europe who are full of fear*” (Orbán, 2015, Sep. 3). The (in)securitization attempts are overt to the extent of being blatant. The migrant influx is presented as “*an invasion of Europe*” (The Prime Minister's Office, 2015, Nov. 9). In the same statement that explicitly defended the use of the migration-terrorism nexus the Foreign Minister (FM) simply stated “*European people must be protected*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015, Nov. 18). Other examples

connect the topic to the possibility of overall success for the EU (Orbán, 2016, Jul. 13 & 2018, Mar. 20). It was also suggested early on that “*everything stands or falls on the closure of borders*” (Orbán, 2016, Dec. 16). There are also multiple utterances that suggest that Hungarians will not have a future unless the migrants are kept out (Orbán, 2018, Apr. 7 & Mar. 20; 2019, Feb. 11). All these statements frame the referent object as an existential threat to various aspects of the EU as a whole, or Hungary more specifically. These narratives are not only constructed at the *meso-level*, but they are also actively defended in public discourse. For example, the FM stated that “*it is unacceptable to not speak about the security aspects of migration*” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018, May. 22). The PM had also previously established that “*defending the border is a national task*” (Orbán, 2017, Jul. 21), an utterance that actively separates the ownership of border control from the EU.

The first years of (in)securitization of the migrants in the EU by Hungary mostly relied on exaggerated claims about the supposed pragmatic effects on society. With the continued need for the justification of the *illegal-practice* measures, later (in)securitization attempts instead shifted into a more cultural angle. The newly constructed narratives instead relied on the attack on Christian values and the usage of anti-Semitic rhetoric. There are several instances of statements regarding the “Soros plot” and that the plan includes far more migration to Hungary (Orbán, 2017, Oct. 20 & Oct. 27; 2018, Mar. 2). Kalmar (2020) writes that when using narratives that include the Jewish financier George Soros, governments can utilize anti-Semitic grievances while claiming the opposite (p. 182). O’Donnell’s (2021) article also shows the connection between globalism (in this case the EU in Brussels), Christian Zionist anti-globalism and the anti-Semitic figure of “the Jew”. When the (in)securitization attempts that only suggest primarily pragmatic consequences of migrants are not enough, the Hungarian government instead resorted to blatant anti-Semitism. The anti-Semitic “Soros

plot” narrative is not even the most overt collection of utterances regarding the migrant's supposed attack on Christian (and thus Hungarian) values. The PM also stated that “*Without Christian culture there will be no free life in Europe, if we fail to defend our Christian culture we will lose Europe, and Europe will no longer belong to Europeans*” (Orbán, 2019, Mar. 15). At this point in the gradual intensification of the (in)securitization process, the migration question is now completely existential to the entire continent. It is then suggested that “*Hungary will protect the borders no matter what* (The Prime Minister’s Office, 2019, Apr. 3) and then soon after Orbán doubles down with the most conspicuous utterance out of all three cases; “*that there will be no strong Europe without strong and successful nation states; that on the continent priority must be given to European culture based on Christian values; and that “Europe’s borders must be defended against the migrant invasion”* (Orbán, 2019, May. 3). The multiple and escalating intensity of the (in)securitization attempts shows the intentionality of Hungarian officials on the matter. They will not let their country turn into an “*immigrant country*” (Orbán, 2018, Feb. 21 & Mar. 9), because they must protect all that they have (Orbán, 2017, Oct. 25).

### *7.2.2 Border Hunters and Doubling Down on Pushbacks*

The *illegal-practice* measures in the Hungarian case are implemented as overtly as the (in)securitization attempts that came before its introduction. The *illegal-practice* measures are not only unapologetically performed, but in contrast to the two other researched states, they are also being openly justified in the official discourse. Not only is it being justified in official discourse but there was also an amendment to legalise pushbacks of asylum seekers from the country in 2016, a process that is extrajudicial within EU laws (ECRE, 2016, Jul. 7). That amendment made it “legal” for the Hungarian border police to practice the pushbacks, and thus the practice started becoming official policy. This also means that the Hungarian

border police started reporting the practice officially, and so the numbers shown here come from the Hungarian authorities themselves. The number of pushbacks between 2015 and mid-2016 are less clear, but in a report by the Asylum Information Database that cites the Hungarian police force, the figures for pushbacks are the following: July 5 until the 21st of December 2016 saw 8,466 pushbacks, 2017 saw 9,259, 2018 saw 4,151 pushbacks, 2019 saw 11,101 pushbacks, 2020 saw 25,603 pushbacks and 2021 saw 72,787 pushbacks (AIDA, 2022, Apr. 14). It should be noted that these numbers do not add up to those cited from the DRC prior - which e.g., stated 592 pushbacks between January and November 2021. The DRC reported far fewer pushbacks than the Hungarian police, and this may have to do with the Hungarian emphasis on self-rule on the matter. It also seems that it is advantageous for Hungarian officials to flaunt the harshness of their policy application, this may contribute to the sheer scale of the reports. The flaunting of the implemented harsh measures can be illustrated best by the initiation of a new police function in 2017, a force called the Border Hunters (Orbán, 2017, Mar. 7; Than, 2017, Mar. 9). In the inaugural speech of the Border Hunters Orbán emphasized the supposedly heroic actions these men and women would perform, protecting their homeland by means of *illegal-practice* measures. With the Border Hunter's introduction, the *illegal-practice* measures are not only openly defended, but those carrying out the offences are idealized.

### 7.2.3 Legal Protests by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)

The Hungarian case, with its most overt (in)securitization attempts and implementation of the *illegal-practice* measures, also saw the most tangible protest from the EU. Apart from the vocalized protests by various EU functions, a type of protest that Croatia also saw, the clearest protest from the EU towards Hungary was a legal one. On the 17th of December 2020, the CJEU declared that the pushbacks taking place in Hungary were illegal (CJEU,

2020, Dec. 17). This protest is coherent with my prior theoretical reasoning based on the power-laden relationship that the EU as an audience has with the individual EU states as *meso-level* (in)securitizing actors. I proposed that since the EU is a supranational organization, there should be possibilities of legal consequences for states that are actively pursuing *illegal-practice* measures against migrants within EU territories. However, this legal protest only occurred four years after the Hungarian legal amendment that made pushbacks “legal”, and after tens of thousands of pushbacks, but it is a tangible protest nonetheless. It is here that it is integral to recognize the difference between protests and judge whether the protest is *substantive* or not. While the protest came from a high-level EU institution and was clearly an active disagreement with the *illegal-practice* measures of the Hungarian government, it amounted to practically nothing. Rather, 2021 saw an immense almost three-times increase in officially reported pushbacks by the Hungarian border police, from 25,603 in 2020 to 72,787 (AIDA, 2022, Apr. 14). The CJEU decision is the most concrete protest seen from the EU against Hungary, yet its results were *unsubstantial*.

### ***7.3 The Croatian Case***

(In)securitization attempts at the *meso-level* in Croatia can be situated between the numerous overt utterances of the Hungarian regime and the more subtle narratives propagated by Romania. The constructed narrative from Croatia is mostly focused on the migration-terrorism nexus, but more explicitly than in the Romanian case. Other main themes include the need to preserve European values and the instability of the “southern neighbourhood” which in turn supposedly de-stabilizes all of Europe. The Croatian example presents a strong case for a *meso-level* actor successfully (in)securitizing the influx of migrants towards the EU. It, along with the Hungarian case, also shows actual protests by EU functions. But here again, the protests were *unsubstantial* and led to no pragmatic change in

behaviour by the (in)securitizing actor. Uniquely among the cases, Croatia also saw explicit support for their *illegal-practice* measures by an EU institution even after abundant coverage of the situation on the Croatia-BiH border. As such, the Croatian government did not only see non-protests but also the explicit approval of the *illegal-practice* measures.

### 7.3.1 *The Southern Neighbourhood, European Values, and the Migration-Terrorism Nexus*

One of the main initial discourses constructed by the Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs is the need to have a stable “southern neighbourhood”, with a particular focus on the problems posed by instability in BiH. It is to BiH that the majority of the pushing back takes place. Yet, this narrative does not situate the referent object as a necessarily existential threat. Rather, it establishes that the stability of the region is integral to overall European stability (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2015, Mar. 16 & 27; Apr. 13 & 15), a discourse that consequent more explicit (in)securitization attempts build on. Importantly in the Croatian case, the pushbacks are not official policy (like in Hungary), rather, according to several NGOs (Amnesty Int, 2021, Oct. 7; DRC, 2022, Jan. 25; HRW, 2020, Oct. 29) the practice is utilized as a de facto tool of local political authorities on the *micro-level* of analysis. So, the linkage between the *meso-level* and *micro-level* is not as explicit as within the Hungarian case. As will be shown, however, the awareness and non-protest of the *illegal-practice* measures by the Croatian government in combination with the (in)securitizing narratives shows a strong implicit linkage. Following a similar pattern to the Romanian case, the first (in)securitization attempts at the onset of the influx of migrants were more subtle in their phrasing. An attempt that exemplifies this approach was uttered on the 8th of February 2016, when the FM at the time pleaded for the “*preservation of this common home called Europe*” (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2016, Feb. 8). In the same press release, the FM furthers the narrative by presenting the migrants as a problem

in regard to even the possibility of living together peacefully, and for the people of Europe to be protected.

The more explicit (in)securitization attempt came later, linked with an opportunistic populist narrative bound in time to the new Immigration Law that was adopted in late November 2020 (Butković, 2021, Sep. 14). This act, the Promulgating The Aliens Act, was meant to make it easier for third-country nationals to stay in Croatia (Promulgating the Aliens Act, 2020, Dec. 2). However, following the FM's (in)securitization attempt about one month prior to the Acts decision, the country saw an increase in both the number of reported pushbacks as well as an increase in violence (DRC, n.d.). Combatting illegal immigration was presented as an explicit remedy to the terrorist attacks that had recently taken place in the EU. In reference to the recent terrorist attacks, the FM states that both Croatia and the EU have to work on *“preventing attacks that violate the security of citizens and that is why it's important to combat illegal immigration.”* (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, 2020, November 3). The (in)securitization attempt took place just one day after the Vienna attack when public anxiety was still fresh - a context ripe for populist rhetoric (Rumelili, 2021). The FM's attempt not only subscribes to the migration-terrorism nexus but is also presenting the reference incidents insincerely. The two specific attacks referenced that had recently taken place were the murder of Samuel Paty as well as the 2020 Vienna attacks. Neither perpetrator was an illegal immigrant; the perpetrator from France was a naturalized citizen after having arrived in the country as a child, and the Austrian perpetrator was an Austrian-born citizen (Onishi & Méheut, 2020, October 16; Pancevski et al., 2020, November 4). Unlike the Romanian example where the emphasis is on linking the two referent objects, here it is suggested that terrorism - a seemingly existential threat - can be countered by stopping illegal

immigration. This (in)securitization attempt unjustly categorizes the many asylum seekers firstly as illegal immigrants, and secondly as terrorists.

### *7.3.2 Systemic Usage of Pushbacks*

Because of the sheer number of illegal pushbacks that has occurred from Croatia to BiH, it is the most widely investigated case by human rights organizations. Because of the prevalence pushbacks as means of dealing with the referent object “under the radar”, rather than as official policy, it is Croatia that was initially accused by various human rights organizations of systemic utilization (Amnesty Int, 2021, Oct. 7; DRC, 2022, Jan. 25; HRW, 2020, Oct. 29). Between June 2019 and September 2021 in excess of 30,000 pushbacks were reported in Croatia (ECRE, 2021, Oct. 22), the second-highest count, only surpassed by Hungary in the same period. It is also the state in which the highest amount of abuses accompanying the pushbacks is reported. Two-thirds of the pushbacks included reports of physical abuse (DRC, 2020, Oct.), and there was also a general pattern in the reports of invasive searching and sexual violence (ECRE, 2021, Oct. 22). The combination of the most reported pushbacks by human rights groups as well as the high number of reported accompanying abuses has also meant that the pushbacks from Croatia are the most publicized of the three investigated cases. This high level of publicity implies, in combination with the official (in)securitizing utterances, that there should be a greater awareness of the *illegal-practice* measures by the audience.

### *7.3.3 Failures to Reach Authority by Ombudsmen*

With the rampant publicity regarding the Croatian use of *illegal-practice* measures, the country also saw some protests by the EU. However, like in the Hungarian case, none of these protests were *substantive*. And more importantly, the protests against Croatian

*illegal-practice* measures underwent a long period of negligence before the complaints were even acknowledged. Interestingly, not only was there an initial pattern of ignorance and negligence regarding the practices but explicit approval by an EU branch. Croatia saw support for their pushbacks when FRONTEX made statements in support of the “*appropriate and effective behaviour*” of Croatian border guards (Williamson, 2019, Jul. 15). This support came years after the reports of pushbacks had reached the media, and only days after the President of Croatia had admitted that the pushbacks were taking place on Swiss TV (SRF, 2019, Jul. 9). Before this public admittance, the Ministry of the Interior of Croatia had instead been using a strategy of accusing human rights organizations of fabricating the reports by having activists impersonate Croatian border guards (HRW, 2019, Jul. 15). The Croatian authorities were not only actively denying and constructing conspiracies regarding the existence of the practices. The Croatian Ombudswoman requested an explanation from Zagreb for the pushbacks in 2017 and suggested that the pushbacks had been ongoing since 2016 (right after the initial (in)securitization attempt by the FM). This request was ignored by the Croatian government (Republic of Croatia Ombudsman, 2018, Mar.), and as such amounted to no protest. This was only the start of authorities ignoring requests for statements regarding the pushbacks.

Several human rights organizations communicated their grievances regarding the topic to the EU Commission, only to be ignored as well. This ignorance by the Commission instead led to an internal investigation into the Commission’s non-protest by the EU Ombudsman; the Ombudsman simply asked why Amnesty’s request for an explanation was ignored (O’Reilly, 2020, Nov. 6). In regards to this specific interaction, it should be noted that Croatia’s border protection is in part financially supported directly by the Commission. The first *unsubstantial* response to the Ombudsman stated that monitoring mechanisms would be implemented to

ensure appropriate conduct by border police (GUE/NGL, 2019, Apr. 2). No details regarding how this monitoring mechanism would be set up were provided, and whether anything in this regard has even happened has so far not been reported by any source. This protest is thus even vaguer than the legal decision made by the CJEU in the Hungarian case and with arguably an even lesser pragmatic effect. Predictably, with the lack of *substantive* protest, *illegal-practice* measures have only increased since. The only other *unsubstantial* protest that Croatia has seen from the EU is that the Commission has stated that the topic was taken “*very seriously*” (Johansson, 2021, Apr. 14, p. 9). It should also be noted that along with the gradual increase in reports even after the *unsubstantial* protests and the President's admittance on Swiss TV, the new Croatian leadership has reverted to a strategy of denial. A recent statement by the PM suggested that all practices on the border were being conducted in accordance with international obligations. Another instance of denial took place when the President suggested that the three publicized detentions of border guards (Trkanjec, 2021, Oct. 11) were “*clearly isolated instances*”. Because if they were not isolated instances then the pushbacks would be far more widely known and reports would be seen more (ERC, 2021, Oct. 15). Since then, the previously large agglomeration of reports has only become more numerous, and the pushbacks are only increasing in occurrence.

## **8. Discussion**

The analysis shows that the expected (in)securitization attempts and dynamics thereafter do take place between individual EU states and the EU. These (in)securitization attempts and later implementation of *illegal-practice* extraordinary measures are then generally met by either total non-protest or *unsubstantial* protests. An important aspect is that there is a significant variation between both the intensity of (in)securitization processes as well as the level of response by the EU between the cases. One distinguishable trend in the analysis

suggests that there is a correlation between the amount and intensity of the attempts, and the scale of implementation of the *illegal-practice* measures. In those terms, Hungarian representatives uttered the most overt (in)securitization attempts and saw the most reported pushbacks. Croatia was the case with the second most intensive (in)securitization processes, and again, the second most pushbacks. And lastly, Romania had the most subtle construction of the anti-migration discourse, as well as the least number of pushbacks. The other central identifiable correlation is the level of protests by the EU and the previously mentioned factors. The more intense the (in)securitization attempts and thus also implementation of pushbacks, the more protests by the EU. At first glance, this seems somewhat contradictory to the logic outlined in theoretical justification, since (in)securitization, if successful, is meant to counter potential protests by the audience by legitimizing the implemented extraordinary measures. But as has been emphasized, the number of protests is not as integral to the (in)securitization process as the substance of those protests. And in neither of the cases have there been *substantive* protests. Even the most significant protest, the court decision by the CJEU, amounted to no effects in terms of countering the extraordinary measure.

Another aspect that is present in each of the three cases is the utilization of the migration-terrorism nexus. Its wrongful use was only briefly mentioned previously, but there is a rich body of literature about the supposed connection between migrants and terrorism (see e.g., Bove et al., 2021; Galantino, 2022; Helbling & Meierrieks, 2020; Nussio et al., 2019; Pickering, 2004; Triestman & Gomez 2021). The topic is certainly interpreted in accordance with a plurality of perspectives, but a meta-conclusion can be made from the articles. That conclusion is that there is no increase in terrorism with an increase in migration, the nexus is false. The abovementioned articles generally refer to (in)securitization processes in the *general (in)securitized context (thin description* understanding) utilization of the term.

But interestingly, Nussio et al. (2019), who do differentiate between individual states (*meso-level*) in their analysis, conclude that the nexus is not effective in contexts in which migrants have not been strongly (in)securitized (p. 8). This conclusion backs up the dynamic between the *general (in)securitized context* and the more specific attempts leading to the actual implementation of extraordinary measures. The two understandings of (in)securitization, as previously mentioned, go hand-in-hand. The last primary potential variable that was mentioned in the case selection was the possibility of Schengen membership affecting the analysis. I expected Schengen membership to have an effect in one of two ways. Either the EU would be harsher on a Schengen member because it is more interconnected with the rest of the EU, and thus what happens in a Schengen country threatens the liberal legitimacy of the Schengen project itself. Or I was expecting the EU to be less harsh towards states outside of Schengen, but not because it does not have “skin in the game”, so to speak. Rather, a lessened public reaction to *illegal-practice* measures would be beneficial to the EU as it is looking to expand Schengen membership to non-Schengen EU-member states (ETIAS, 2022, Apr. 28). This second logic is also supported by the Commission’s vocal support for Croatian ascension to Schengen, still long after reports of systemic *illegal-practice* measures had been published (HRW; 2019, Nov. 8). Basically, any reaction by the EU that recognizes the *illegal-practice* measure either threatens the legitimacy of Schengen in its current state or the recognition threatens the legitimacy of expansion. Both Schengen implications seem to have played a role in the various narratives, but because the analysis is non-positivistically conceived it is difficult to put weight on how big of a role the need for Schengen legitimacy played.

## 9. Conclusion

In response to the research puzzle, the reconceptualization of (in)securitization in order to be able to appropriately capture actual *illegal-practice* measures has utilized a non-positivistically conceived process-tracing methodology. This methodology emphasized a focus on process, rather than a broader contextual analysis that much of the existing literature relies on. When this altered (in)securitization perspective was applied to three relevant cases, the theory was better able to show the extent to which actual practices took place. Importantly, the case studies also showed the implied linkages between the *meso-level* (in)securitization attempts and the later practices deployed at the *micro-level*. This linkage could be shown by both explicit links, such as the Hungarian government's implementation of border hunters as policy. Or more implicitly, such as the Croatian government's near-continuous denial of the practices, even after having recognized the *illegal-practice* measures earlier in the researched period. The case studies show that the conceptual development offered in the theoretical justification can more accurately discover actual practices deployed after the utterances of the (in)securitizing actor. The reconceptualization is also able to establish a fuller picture of the whole (in)securitization process; a process-traced narrative can be constructed connecting initial (in)securitization attempts, the following deployment of extraordinary measures and the non-protest by the audience. Thus, the conceptual development, along with the studied cases successfully tackles the research puzzle presented. In terms of generalizability, there are several dynamics in the research that influences the reconceptualization greatly, e.g., that the audience is a supranational organization that has legal powers of the individual states. That alone has enormous implications on the reconceptualization, as it determines the power-laden relationship between the (in)securitizing actor and the perceived audience. That emphasis on a

power-laden relationship in the chosen context arguably establishes the EU - as an audience to individual states - as a prototypical aspect of the case studies.

Nonetheless, the general notion that (in)securitization theory may be used to dissect actual motives and practices rather than establish *general (in)securitized contexts*, a matter that has largely been lost in contemporary academia regarding the topic, is re-established. The process-centric *thick description* is also made applicable to an international setting, rather than the traditional national setting between a political leader and their constituency. This original scope described by Wæver (The Open University, 2014, Oct. 3) is also extended further than looking at the political motives vis-à-vis the reaction of that political actor's constituency. Instead, with an emphasis on the power-laden relationship between the (in)securitizing actor and the audience, specific (in)securitization narratives may be established in new settings. As such, the implications of the reconceptualization is applicable to more settings. It suggests that there is some lacking precision in the current primary usage of (in)securitization. To capture the actual measures taking place, a *thick description* conceptualization of (in)securitization theory that is able to construct a narrative of non-positivistically conceived causal links is necessary. This basic logic of more specificity needed for the application of (in)securitization theory in order to accurately capture the whole process does some weight in terms of generalizability. The main implication on the study of (in)securitization theory is as follows; I have suggested that if we are to properly understand the malpractices and intention of (in)securitizing actors it is not enough to label a context as (in)securitized and then understand actions and motives within that general context.

Rather, to understand how these political actors act, the (in)securitization processes must be more closely scrutinized. This change in direction also has implications on how the treatment

of individuals that come to be exposed to (in)securitization processes. Remembering a core implication of the theory; an (in)securitized referent object is by nature exposed to more extraordinary means that are normally justifiable. Hence, the processes that lead to the justification should at best be countered, but if not countered in public discourse, then at least these real injustices should be acknowledged. To understand the scope of potentially utilized *illegal-practices*, further research may take the theoretical scope established in this project into other contexts in which (in)securitization theory has also morphed into what could be labelled a *thin description general (in)securitized context* understanding. If applied according to the presented conceptualization, the lacking explanatory value past the initial (in)securitizing discourse that occurs when the *thin description* is utilized may be overcome. The project has shown that with the presented reconceptualization - sensitive to both the (in)securitization theory's contemporary usage and its original conception - it is possible to avoid losing explanatory value in regard to actual practices while still maintaining the integrity of an established *general (in)securitized context*. The reconceptualization can be applied within the understanding of the *general (in)securitized context* in order to better understand the motives of political actors at the *meso-level* and the actual practices of agents at the *micro-level*.

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