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From Deal to Pact: The Evolution of EU Migration Governance in Greece from 2016 to 2026

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Citation

Georgakopoulos, F. I. (2025). *From Deal to Pact: The Evolution of EU Migration Governance in Greece from 2016 to 2026*.

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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**From Deal to Pact: The Evolution of EU Migration Governance in
Greece from 2016 to 2026**

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S2170248

12,841 words

30/06/2025

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 2025, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg found Greece guilty of carrying out an illegal pushback of a Turkish national from Greece to Turkey in 2019. Besides this individual case, what is more important about this event is that the ECHR found reasonable evidence that pushbacks are a systematic practice in Greece (ECHR 2025). While there had long been speculations and accusations regarding these practices, the verdict of the ECHR constituted the first conviction of Greece by a court. Although the conviction was covered broadly by Greek and international media, neither the Greek Government nor the European Union commented on the case. What is also interesting is that the European Union's new Commissioner for Migration and Internal Affairs, Magnus Brunner, was in Athens one week after the court's ruling. There, while he met Greek officials, such as Prime Minister Mitsotakis, he did not mention the ECHR's verdict. Instead, he mainly focused on the implementation of the 2026 EU Migration Pact, which was also the main reason for his trip (eKathimerini 2025).

This case constitutes a small example of a broader issue that this thesis is going to build on. Due to its geographical position, Greece is an EU frontline state. In the past, like during the refugee crisis of 2015, it faced the challenge of accommodating more than 850,000 migrants and refugees in a single year. Although the number of arrivals has fallen sharply since then, migration and its management have remained a major issue in Greek domestic politics. Since 2016 and due to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal, Greece has been able to manage the influx more effectively. However, this new more effective approach, has been criticized due to alleged violations of refugees' rights. The trend peaked in February 2020 during the Greek-Turkish border crisis, which Greece saw as a Turkish attempt to pressure both Greece and the EU by instrumentalizing refugees. As the thesis will show, this event was the turning point for the further securitization of refugees by Greece. As of today, the situation has entered a new phase as EU member states are preparing to implement the new Migration Pact, which will come into force in July 2026. With the pact, the European Commission wants to distribute the burden of migration more fairly among EU member states "while remaining grounded in European values" (European Commission 2024). This leads us to the following question:

Does the 2026 EU Migration Pact challenge the security-driven Greek migration governance established by the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal and reinforced by the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis?

Before addressing the research question, the thesis will begin with a theoretical framework to provide a foundation for the analysis. It will mainly focus on the IR theory of Securitization and how, according to this theory, migration has been framed as a security threat, which in turn prioritizes border control and deterrence measures against migrants. Additionally, the framework will analyze the concept of ‘the Border’, where it will emphasize that borders are not merely geographical demarcation lines, but also are dynamic constructs. Thereafter, the literature review will shortly analyze EU migration governance and will focus on the so-called externalization debate.

To answer the research question accordingly, the thesis’ research part will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will focus on the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal and how it formalized the security-driven migration governance. As will shortly be shown, this was not something new, as in the past, before 2015, Greece had used similar methods to deter migrants and refugees. During the 2015 migration crisis, the response was characterized by ad hoc measures, but what will be shown in the first chapter is how the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal offered a structured framework that reinforced the securitized approach Greece implemented. The second chapter will look deeper into the Greek-Turkish border crisis of 2020, during which Greece accused Turkey of instrumentalizing thousands of migrants to exert pressure on Greece and the EU. According to actors in the field, this event marked a turning point for an even more militarized and securitized approach in deterring migrants attempting to reach the EU via Greece. Simultaneously, the border crisis showed the shortcomings of the EU-Turkey Deal and the limits of European externalization strategies. The third chapter will focus on the Pact’s key provisions, which are central to the agreement, and on issues like border security, asylum reforms, and the burden-sharing mechanism. The goal of the thesis is not to predict the future and the way the 2026 Pact will be possibly implemented, but rather to compare its key provisions with the current status quo. By making this comparison, the fourth chapter will attempt to bring the outcomes of the previous three chapters together and to find out what introduction of the 2026 EU Migration Pact means for Greece’s security-driven approach.

The thesis will adopt a qualitative research approach when examining the research question. It will rely on document analysis, focusing on the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal and the 2026 EU Migration Pact, showing the framework on which Greece’s migration policy is built.

Additionally, it will get involved in case study research, such as the 2020 border crisis, which will show how such events can influence national policies, in our case, Greece's, regarding migration management.

By linking together, the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, and the 2026 EU Migration Pact, the thesis will try to provide an extended perspective on how migration management changes within a security framework. While most studies have focused on the EU level, this thesis will try to show that there is an interplay between EU treaties and regulations and domestic politics. By using process tracing and case study analysis, the thesis fills a gap in the literature by connecting different policy moments and events, while at the same time assessing their impact on frontline states like Greece. Next to that, by including insights from actors in the field, the thesis will try to bridge the gap between policy-oriented research and academic theory.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces one theory and one concept and tries to lay the foundation for a better analysis of Greece's role in EU migration governance. The well-known Securitization theory fits well as it explains how issues such as migration are framed as threats, resulting in extraordinary measures taken to deal with this perceived threat. At the same time, the 'concept of borders' will be analyzed, showing that borders have their own dynamic and, in some instances, work as control mechanisms.

Securitization Theory

When looking at the development of EU migration governance over the years, a clear pattern becomes visible. More and more often, the influx of refugees and migrants has been treated as a problem that needs to be solved. In some cases, which will be further examined in the thesis, this influx is not only seen as a challenge but even as a threat. This kind of discourse has become common at the nation-state level, especially during domestic elections in European countries.

The so-called 'Securitization theory', also known as the 'Copenhagen School', helps explain this process. In short, it describes a process by which issues that are not considered security threats are ultimately framed as such. The theory follows social constructivist logic, arguing that the concept of 'security' is socially constructed and therefore cannot be objective. In other words, threats are constructed, and thus, who and what is considered a threat, and who and what should be protected from, are also constructed (Williams 2003: 513). According to the theory's creators, Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, there is a specific way in which securitization takes place in practice, through the so-called 'security speech act.' To be efficient and successful, the security speech act has four components (Elbe 2006). The first component is the *securitizing actor*, who frames a specific issue as a matter of security. Most often, these are public figures such as politicians. The *securitizing actor* communicates these concerns to the *referent object*, which is supposedly or, in practice, threatened by the concerning issue. The issue itself is also a component and is typically framed as an *existential threat*. As a reaction to the threat, *emergency measures* are taken, which constitute the last component. In short, 'securitization' describes the process through which an issue that was previously non-politicized becomes elevated into the sphere of security (idem: 126).

As will become clear in the following parts of the thesis, securitization theory is highly relevant when studying migration and its governance. As previously discussed in the literature review, the humanitarian dimension of the EU's approach to migration has been challenged

over time. This thesis will argue that securitization helps explain this process. For example, during the 2015 migration crisis, as the event is commonly referred to, the term ‘migration crisis’, itself is a part of securitization. ‘Crisis’ is a loaded term, as it carries connotations of urgency and danger, and using it to describe the influx of people into the EU could result in extraordinary measures being taken to address this issue (Stepka 2020: 9-10). Adding to this, often this discourse is reinforced by racial prejudices, as migrants are frequently portrayed as the ‘other’ in contrast to the residents of the country or continent to which they flee (Ibrahim 2005).

The use of specific discourse can reinforce the way migrants and refugees are treated both outside and within European borders. For example, “describing migrants as ‘illegal’ consequently criminalizes (and even dehumanizes) them, suggesting that, as in the case of other criminals, they are threatening and should be prosecuted for breaking the law and consequently removed from the host society” (Stepka 2020: 36). According to Atahan Demirkol, these perceived threats are often baseless, as the ‘threat’ posed by migrants is frequently exaggerated. Nevertheless, as will become clear in the analysis part of the thesis, this framing influences policy (Demirkol 2022). In short, the emphasis on security is driven by the process of securitization, and as a result, extraordinary measures are taken to address migration, sometimes including military measures, as has been the case in Greece in recent years. Therefore, “militarization can be seen as a security practice that is an extension of securitization” (Kinacioglu 2023: 2435).

The Concept of ‘Border’

While Securitization Theory does explain how an issue such as migration is framed as a threat, the Border Theory offers a complementary framework that explains how physical and symbolic borders function in the realm of migration governance. According to this theory, which was developed by Thomas Nail, a border is more than the classical type that comes to mind, one consisting of a border fence and possibly a (de)militarized zone, as is often the case. In addition to being territorial lines between states, the Border Theory emphasizes the dynamic and multi-scalar nature of borders (Nail 2016).

Although the concept of the border has remained the same, the actual meaning of this concept is a dynamic process that evolves over time. Since the establishment of nation-states, borders have been reinforced as they constitute not only a boundary between different states but also a boundary between different peoples (Balibar 2002: 75-86). However, even the abolition of physical borders achieved in much of Europe through the implementation of the

Schengen Treaty does not imply that borders have disappeared. Schengen may have removed the border from the border, but other mechanisms that control the movement of people continue to exist and have been strengthened (ibid.). For example, Schengen has brought enhanced coordination between national police forces and better cooperation in assessing asylum rights and granting nationality. Therefore, one could argue that although the physical border may be absent, other mechanisms take its place, and “in this way, a new mode of discrimination between the national and the alien is being established” (idem: 78).

The free movement of people, supposedly established by Schengen, is, in practice, not universally applied. Simultaneously, the absence of internal borders has reinforced the external borders that EU countries share with third countries. In the last ten years, many EU external borders have been fortified with border fences, such as those along the Polish-Belarusian and Hungarian-Serbian borders. This is a relatively new phenomenon, intensified after the 2015 migrant crisis. It is telling that between 2014 and 2022, the total length of EU countries’ border fences grew from 315 km to 2,048 km (Dumbrava 2022). Besides being physical barriers, fences are also symbolic, they not only divide territories but also clearly separate those inside from those outside the border. According to Nicholas De Genova, fences create a so-called ‘Border Spectacle’ which is “a spectacle of enforcement at the border, whereby migrant ‘illegality’ is rendered spectacularly visible” (2013: 1181). Crossing a reinforced border by trespassing is indeed an illegal act, and various politicians often emphasize this illegality when referring to migrants and refugees. We will see that this is also the case in Greece.

The central thesis of Wendy Brown’s book ‘Walled States, Waning Sovereignty’ is that although the sovereignty of nation-states is in decline, fortified borders give states the illusion that they are regaining control (2010). Especially in cases where a border separates an adversarial state, the focus on security becomes greater, and the incentives for visual displays of control grow stronger. In our case, the 2020 border crisis and its aftermath are a clear example of this, but similar examples can be seen elsewhere—for example, at the Polish-Belarusian border, which Poland plans to seal completely off (Minder 2024).

Consequently, it becomes clear that a border is not just a geographic demarcation line between two states, but rather an active institution. For this thesis, the concept offers an important outlook for understanding the dynamics that are present at the external EU border. When applied to the case of Greece, it helps reveal how the EU-Turkey Deal, the 2020 Turkish-Greek border crisis, and the 2026 Migration Pact can be interpreted from a different perspective.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter explores the evolution of migration governance in the EU and the tension between the value-driven, humanitarian ideals and more securitized externalization practices. This is examined through key moments also addressed in the thesis: the 2016 Deal, 2020 border crisis and the 2026 Migration Pact. In short, this review identifies a retreat from EU values in favor of externalization, thus a greater reliance on third countries to manage migration.

Migration Governance in the European Union

The governance of migrants and refugees in the European Union has long rested on a dubious debate. On the one hand, the EU, with its normative and humanitarian policies, is stressing that the Union should offer shelter to those in need (Manners 2002). This ideal is reflected in Ursula von der Leyen's first State of the Union address as President of the European Commission:

“We will take a human and humane approach. Saving lives at sea is not optional. And those countries who fulfil their legal and moral duties or are more exposed than others, must be able to rely on the solidarity of our whole European Union... Everybody has to step up here and take responsibility” (European Commission 2020a).

In the past, especially in the context of the Cold War, Western European states that constituted the European Economic Community (EEC), the EU's predecessor, emphasized open borders to contrast the restrictive nature of the Eastern bloc's' border policies (Lavenex 2001). After the end of the Cold War, and with the further integration of the Union with the Amsterdam treaty of 1993, migration partially lost its humanitarian character and became one of many other policy issues (ibid.). Consequently, another approach was developed, which “is rooted in a state-centered, realist philosophy”. According to this Realist approach, the EU and its member states have the duty to protect their borders and their sovereignty (Meyers 2000: 1263). Although this had always been the case, from the 1990s onwards, further European integration created the need for new frameworks.

Paradoxically, it seems that the further enlargement and the integration of the EEC into the EU did not necessarily benefit asylum seekers and migrants. While the Schengen Agreement, which was signed in 1985 and first implemented in 1995, guaranteed the free movement of people within the EU, it had the opposite effect for those attempting to enter from

outside the Union (Maani 2018). To compensate for the removal of the internal borders, external borders were strengthened. The Dublin Regulation, signed in 1990 and entering into force in 1997, can be seen as a consequence of this. The regulation is based on the first-entry principle, meaning that the country where asylum seekers first enter the EU is responsible for their claim (ibid.). As a result, the ‘burden’ is not shared equally by all states but falls disproportionately on EU frontier states, such as Greece. To prevent migrants and refugees from entering their territory, in turn, those states reinforce their borders with non-EU countries. Because of this reinforcement of the EU’s external border, the Dublin regulation is “widely regarded as part of a retrenchment from generous asylum policies and acceptance of refugees in Europe” (Newland and Papademetriou 1998: 643).

As becomes clear, EU migration governance is caught between the so-called internalization and externalization approaches. As its name suggests, the former approach involves managing the influx of migrants and refugees internally among EU member states. Common asylum policies and burden-sharing mechanisms are central to this model (Thielemann and Hobolth 2016). By contrast, the externalization approach, which became more mainstream during the 2015 migration crisis, focuses on outsourcing the migration ‘problem’ to the very external borders of the EU and ideally to third countries (Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022). This approach is controversial, as it ‘forces’ border states to ‘protect’ their borders against irregular entries using ‘externalization practices’ such as building border walls and carrying out pushbacks (ibid.).

This so-called ‘externalization’, which characterizes the EU’s migration governance, became even more evident with the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal. Simply put, the Deal aimed to curb the influx of migrants by returning asylum seekers from Greece to Turkey in exchange for funding. The use of a third country to manage migration for the EU makes this Deal a clear example of the externalization of EU migration governance. The 2015 migration crisis exposed the EU’s shortcomings and lack of intra-European solidarity, which is obviously required to implement the internalization approach (Gurkan and Coman 2021: 293). Returning to the humanitarian/realist debate, the EU came under harsh criticism for abandoning its normative values by concluding this Deal (idem: 277). Simultaneously, critics argued that the externalization of migration governance to a third country, in this case Turkey, would make the EU reliant on that third country’s political will (Okuyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016).

That externalization can lead to dependence on third parties became painfully clear for the EU, and particularly for its member state Greece, in February 2020, when Turkey ‘opened the gates’ towards Europe, disregarding the commitments it had made under the 2016 Deal four

years prior. Greece's response was rapid and firm, communicating clearly that it would not allow any illegal crossing into its territory (Kasli 2023). The EU openly supported Greece's actions, thus being in favor of dealing with the issue outside of its external borders. It is clear that the EU wanted to avoid a situation like the one in 2015 and therefore decided to deal with the situation externally rather than internally. Nevertheless, Greece's and the EU's response was sharply criticised for violating human rights, and especially the right to asylum (Amnesty International 2020). Moreover, Greece framed the 'cross-border movements as a 'threat' to the country's national security', which served to justify a derogation from the human rights standards and procedural guarantees that are granted to people seeking protection under EU law (Cortinovic 2021). This is a strong demonstration of the Securitization theory, explained and analyzed in the theoretical framework. The Greek-Turkish border crisis of 2020 thus constitutes a clear example of the EU's externalization approach and its abandonment of its normative values.

The 2026 EU Migration Pact was introduced by the European Commission as an attempt to reform migration governance by promoting greater shared responsibility among member states. This aims to prevent that, in the case of another migrant crisis, certain EU states would bear a disproportionate burden. The so-called 'solidarity mechanism' is intended to relieve pressure on EU frontier states, and one could argue that this could be positive for the rights of asylum seekers, as it could possibly ease pressure from the EU's external borders (De Bruycker 2024). Nevertheless, there has been critique on the pact as it is also based on 'externalization' practices that "take the shape of what the Pact calls 'Migration Partnerships', which are non-legally binding arrangements or 'deals' with non-EU countries" (Carrera and Geddes 2021: 13-14). Therefore, the question remains whether the Pact will improve the treatment of asylum seekers at the border states, especially as it continues to emphasize the protection of the EU's external border (Vella de Fremeaux and Attard 2024). Returning to the normative debate, many human rights organizations argue that the pact is moving in the wrong direction and fails to address the increasingly 'securitized' nature of the EU's migration governance, as we saw developing in this literature review (Fox 2024).

This chapter emphasizes the growing securitization and externalization in EU migration governance, and on Greece's role in this process. The following chapters will further analyze key themes, such as the reliance on third countries, the unequal distribution of responsibility within the EU, and the use of extraordinary measures to deter migrants from entering the Union. In particular, the three key moments, the EU-Turkey Deal, the 2020 border crisis, and the 2026

Migration Pact, will be used to find out whether the latest reforms continue or depart from previous securitized approaches.

Chapter 4: Methodology

When looking at the thesis as a whole, it becomes clear that it has a significant time span of almost 10 years. This is because the thesis aims to demonstrate that the security-driven approach Greece and the EU adopted after the 2015 migration crisis, was a linear process which was developed over time.

Using Greece as a single case study, it will try to look at how domestic and EU dynamics can shape a front-line state's approach to the issue of migration. Besides being a critical case for observing EU securitization in action, Greece itself constitutes a relevant case due to its specific characteristics. Its geographical position on the southeastern edge of the EU makes it a gateway between Asia and Europe, also in terms of the movement of people. At the same time, it also borders Turkey, a key partner of the EU on migration, but also a country with which Greece has long-standing historical tensions and ongoing disputes. In that sense, the case of Greece incorporates many elements: being an EU member while also pursuing its own domestic and international objectives, especially vis-à-vis Turkey, making it a useful testing ground for new EU policies such as the 2026 EU Pact.

To answer the central question, whether the Pact's provisions will likely change Greece's approach, this thesis will make use of the process tracing method. This is a qualitative research method that treats a broad case on the basis of some causal issues by analyzing the sequence of events (Schimmelfennig 2014). More concretely, it will examine how EU migration governance in Greece has evolved by identifying the causal links between the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, the 2020 border crisis, and the 2026 EU Migration Pact. This will happen by identifying securitization logic through observable indicators such as in political speeches, in policy shifts that reinforce this security logic, and in the institutional embedding of extraordinary measures, which can be seen as a consequence of the previous two points. What the three events have in common is that they are seen as turning points. The first two reinforced the securitization of migrants in an almost linear manner. This raises the question of whether the 2026 Pact represents a break with this trajectory and aims for a more humanitarian border and asylum policy. This is something the EU aims at, as officially it is profiling itself as a civil power and thus should not allow humanitarian irregularities to happen at its borders. Ultimately, process tracing not only helps demonstrate that securitization is taking place, but also how and why it has been sustained and intensified over time.

For this, a combination of primary and secondary data will be used. Primary data, for instance, will include EU documents that outline the goals and objectives of specific EU

policies. In addition, speeches and communiques from relevant Greek or EU authorities will be analyzed to identify how to use securitizing language in practice. To enrich the analysis, the thesis will also include interviews with actors in the field, such as migration experts. The secondary data will consist of academic literature on EU and Greek migration policy, as well as NGO reports and media reports on the topic.

Chapter 5: EU-Turkey Deal

According to this chapter the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal is a turning point in EU migration governance. In short, due to the Deal, Greece became the key enforcer of measures aimed at keeping asylum seekers out, like the hotspot system with its overcrowded camps, while also highlighting the strategic leverage Turkey achieved in this process. Thus, the Deal laid the groundwork for further securitization, which, as will become clear in the next chapters, peaked during the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, and parts of the 2016 Deal's logic were also adopted in some of the 2026 EU Pact's provisions.

Context and Origins of the Deal

The 2016 Deal was a bilateral agreement between the EU and Turkey and therefore it is necessary to examine the engagement between the two. While Turkey and the EU officially had a close relationship, as the former had gained candidate status to become an EU member in 1999, from 2013 onwards, growing illiberalism in Turkey had frozen the accession process. This cooled the relations and therefore, the Deal between the two actors was not self-evident (Saatcioglu 2020). Nevertheless, the 2015 migration crisis was such a major shock for the EU, having lost control over its borders, that it saw the need to strike a deal with Turkey. As a neighboring country of Syria, Turkey at that moment hosted more than 1.7 million Syrians who had fled the civil war and a number of them were moving towards the EU (Icduygu 2015). Having no response to deal with the influx, Turkey came to be seen by the EU as the only actor capable of easing the pressure.

This, self-evidently, upgraded Turkey's strategic importance vis-à-vis the EU. So too its leverage over the Union, a factor that, as will be seen in the next chapter of the thesis, contributed to the emergence of the Turkish-Greek border crisis of 2020. The Turkish negotiation position was based on two narratives. First, it challenged the EU's normative image by contrasting the EU's approach with its own refugee support system. Second, it emphasized that Schengen's stability depended on Turkey's cooperation, highlighting internal EU divisions that had undermined the Treaty's key provisions (Okuy and Zaragoza-Cristiani 2016). This negotiation tactic worked, as Turkey secured significant returns for signing the Deal. In addition to €6 billion in pledged financial aid, visa liberalization for Turkish citizens in the Schengen Area was promised, as well as the modernization of the EU-Turkey Customs Union (ibid.). Therefore, it becomes clear that the Deal was concluded with Turkey as the main beneficiary,

while the EU approached this Deal as more of an ad-hoc solution to a pressing issue that threatened its unity.

In response, Turkey had two main duties to fulfill (European Council 2016). First, it had to take all necessary measures to prevent the irregular crossing of migrants into the EU. In practice, this meant targeting smuggling networks and increasing border patrols while cooperating with Frontex and the Hellenic Coast Guard. Second, a return mechanism was introduced, whereby all new irregular migrants had to return to Turkey. However, according to the Deal, for every Syrian migrant returned to Turkey, one Syrian would be resettled from Turkey to an EU member state.

The Deal in Practice and the Consequences for Greece

On first sight, the Deal appeared to be a success. The number of migrants crossing into Greece via Turkey dropped by 98 percent between 2015 and 2016, thus achieving its primary objective (Koenig and Walter-Franke 2017). At the same time, another outcome was that the number of registered deaths and missing persons in the Aegean Sea decreased by 94 percent (from 1,100 to 70 persons) (ibid.). These statistics gave European governments the opportunity to portray the Deal as a success story. On the one hand, it showed that the EU could regain authority over its external borders, and on the other, it could reduce the smuggler routes that put the lives of refugees and migrants in grave danger (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the situation on the ground was less encouraging. Although the Deal had reduced the number of arrivals, crossing into Greece was still an option for refugees, due to the proximity of the Greek islands to the Turkish coast, something the Deal could obviously not influence. What made it less tempting, however, were the conditions on the Greek islands. After the implementation of the Deal, the EU adopted a new approach to accommodate new arrivals. This is the so-called ‘hotspot approach’, which in theory was meant to enable the quick identification and registration of migrants at key external border points (Calarco 2024). In practice, this process stalled, resulting in overcrowded hotspot camps (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) 2016). In 2017, the hotspots on the Greek island had reached 213 percent of their capacity (Demirbas and Miliou 2024). Besides long asylum processing times and legal ambiguities, migrants and refugees also faced extremely poor reception conditions (ibid.). Human rights organizations have accused the EU of letting this situation persist to deter migrants from entering the EU (Danish Refugee Council 2017; Amnesty International 2018). This critique also questions the effectiveness of the Deal, as it is possible to argue that the ‘hotspot approach’ was actually the main reason why migrants postponed their journey to

Europe (Koenig and Walter-Franke, 2017). Therefore, it is logical to argue that the ‘hotspot approach’, introduced by the 2016 Deal, is one of the extraordinary measures used by the EU to prevent irregular migration. Besides their use as places of identification, hotspots were also places of confinement, deterring migrants from entering Greece.

What made matters worse is that a key provision of the Deal was never implemented, as Turkey did not accept deported migrants from Greece, as it was obliged to do (Demirbas and Miliou 2024). This strained the conditions in the camps even more, together with the fact that the Greek authorities did not adequately process asylum applications (ibid.). Thus, as a consequence, the Deal resulted in the externalization of migrants at the very edge of the EU’s borders (Pries and Zulfikar Savci 2023; Demirbas and Miliou 2024). A European ‘problem’ increasingly became an issue for Greece and Turkey to deal with.

The Securitization of Migration through the Deal

As explained in the theoretical framework, when looking for the Securitization of irregular migration, we are searching for two key elements. First is the application of securitizing discourse, and second, the implementation of extraordinary measures to address the issue.

When focusing on Greece’s domestic politics, some interesting findings emerge. At the time of the 2015 migration crisis and the implementation of the Deal, the country was governed by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, from the left-wing Syriza party. During this period, the Greek government adopted a humanitarian approach and “an open borders policy, a positioning in line with the party’s ideological principles and voters’ stances” (Kollias et al. 2025: 16). Although, the 2015 crisis put pressure on this stance, especially after the implementation of the Deal, the Syriza party maintained its stance in practice, allowing migrants and refugees to enter Greece (Shumenkovska 2025). This does not mean, however, that migration was not securitized. According to Georgia Dimari, securitization did take place, even within the Greek government under Tsipras, especially through the junior partner of the Syriza-led coalition, the right-wing ANEL party (2020). For instance, Panos Kammenos, ANEL’s leader and then Minister of Defense, in 2015 attacked refugees with harsh rhetoric stating that “illegal migrants constitute a serious problem” (Koutipandoras.gr 2015). Nevertheless, the opposition of the center-right New Democracy party and especially the extreme-right Golden Dawn party targeted migrants and refugees more aggressively (Dimari 2020). For example, Tsipras’ predecessor as Prime Minister and then leader of the New Democracy party, Antonis Samaras, always referred to migrants as ‘λαθρομετανάστες’, a very laden term that emphasizes their ‘illegality’ (Kollias et

al. 2025). This is the same term used by Panos Kammenos in the previous fragment. Thus, the broader political landscape in Greece at the time adopted a hostile stance towards migration.

When it comes to the European level, while the European Commission has been described as the main securitizing actor at the EU level when it comes to migration, according to Dionysios Stivas, who has researched securitizing discourse at EU level, these accusations are overstated. He argues that the Commission's most senior members "framed the situation more like a 'migration challenge', 'migration crisis', 'refugee crisis', and 'migratory pressure' rather than an existential threat" (2024: 4). However, this does not mean that speech did not play a role. For instance, Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission at that time, made the following statement: "We Europeans no longer have many borders. We have one and we have a shared responsibility to protect it" (Euractiv 2015).

This statement, made while the EU-Turkey Deal was being negotiated, definitely shows that there was a sense of urgency, due to the 2015 crisis. Additionally, securitization can also manifest through administrative practices. For example, after 2016, the role of Frontex was upgraded and included the real 'protection' of the European external borders in contrast to the supportive and auxiliary role it had until then (Asderaki and Markozani 2021).

In short, securitization in Greece was co-produced together with the EU, via the externalization of migration control. Due to the Deal, Greece found itself as a border enforcer and as a delegated agent of the EU's collective migration governance. As will be explored in the next chapter, this reinforced Greece's role as both a shield and a buffer, paving the way for more intensified securitization in later crises.

The changing concept of 'the Border' at the time of the Deal

The EU-Turkey Deal transformed the way borders are perceived and secured. Although they did not physically change and would appear the same on a map, this section argues that due to the Deal, borders were no longer fixed geographical lines, but rather dynamic and shifting boundaries.

First, the Greek islands near the Turkish coast became the real and fortified borders of Europe. Although this was de jure already the case with the establishment of Schengen, the events of 2015 proved that there was little effective barrier to the movement of people across borders toward Northern Europe. However, after the implementation of the Deal, the islands' geographical uniqueness reinforced their border status. As a result, asylum seekers were confined on the islands, sometimes for years. The most extreme and well-known example was refugee camp Moria on the island of Lesbos, where at times more than 20,000 people were

awaiting decisions and appeals under dire conditions (Chapman 2020). In contrast to 2015, as a consequence of the Deal, these people were no longer permitted to travel to mainland Greece, and thus found themselves trapped on the islands after they made their way into the EU (Alexandridis 2024).

Second, Greece found itself in a position where it ceded part of its sovereignty. Through Frontex, from the signing of the Deal onwards, Greece, which did not negotiate directly, had its border with Turkey become a co-managed zone, reducing its national autonomy. This situation fits with Wendy Brown's concept of 'waning sovereignty,' which was analyzed in the theoretical framework. The concept states that countries may use migration control to reclaim sovereignty. Although Greece did not use migration for this purpose, neither during the 2015 migrant crisis nor after the 2016 Deal, in the next chapter, it will become clear that during the 2020 border crisis this actually was the case.

Outcomes and Legacy

The EU-Turkey Deal had a significant impact on Greece's migration governance. Firstly, the Deal achieved its primary goal as it significantly reduced the number of migrants crossing into Greece. Nevertheless, this came at a high humanitarian cost as asylum seekers were confined in overcrowded camps for a prolonged period of time. While according to the EU the Deal was a success story helping the Union restore control of its borders, it is clear that it mainly relied on deterrence. Therefore, a clear shift from humanitarian to security logic is evident.

This chapter analyzed this shift by showing how Greece, and especially its islands bordering Turkey, between 2015 and 2016, transitioned from being a place of transit to becoming an end station. Thus, in a sense, becoming the geographical and institutional frontline. This happened through a securitization process where Greece played a dual role, by protecting its own borders while implementing the EU's externalized control regime. While indeed securitization occurred through speech act, both by Greek and EU officials, the main aspect of securitization in this chapter was that through the implementation of the Deal, extraordinary measures were taken, particularly the confinement of migrants in the so-called hotspots. This case sets the foundation for the thesis's broader argument: that the EU-Turkey Deal institutionalized the security-based migration governance in Greece, which deepened further with the 2020 border crisis, as will be shown in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: The 2020 Greece-Turkey Border Crisis

This chapter demonstrates that the partial failure of the 2016 Deal led to a dead end. Turkey's failure to comply with the rules, while the EU's inability to keep its agreements, created a situation in which the 2016 Deal collapsed, and as a result, the EU's strategy of externalizing migration to third countries came under pressure. To address the issue, and with the EU's blessing, the Greek government securitized migration further, both through speech and through the use extraordinary measures. Through this process, securitized migration governance thus became mainstream, which will be also seen in the 2026 Pact analyzed in the seventh chapter.

Prelude to the Crisis

The EU-Turkey Deal of 2016 augmented the hopes for a better relationship between Turkey and the EU. Although the accession of Turkey into the EU remained a distant dream, the thought was that cooperation on migration and adherence to the clauses of the Deal would bring the two partners closer (Ott 2020). However, in practice, this did not occur for several reasons.

First, as we saw in the previous chapter, Turkey's obligation to receive back Syrian refugees deported from the Greek islands never materialized. This even became official policy when Turkey suspended its bilateral migrant readmission protocol with Greece in June 2018 (Kusku-Sonmez 2024). On the EU's part, Turkey was dissatisfied due to the lack of progress in the visa liberalization negotiations for Turkish citizens and in the Customs Union agreement talks (Dursun-Ozkanca 2022). Therefore, the 2016 Deal, or more precisely, its incomplete implementation, is tightly related to the 2020 border crisis.

Another reason that led to the border crisis was the divergence of Turkish and EU policies over Syria. Turkey's attempts to make a 'safe zone' in Northern Syria to prevent migration flows were disapproved and openly criticized by the EU (Kusku-Sonmez 2024). At the same time, growing anti-Syrian sentiment in Turkey increased pressure on President Erdogan, who was seen as the main figure responsible for 'inviting' Syrians into the country (Secen 2024). On February 27, 2020, 34 Turkish soldiers were killed by an airstrike in the Syrian province of Idlib, offering the Turkish Government a pretext to change course (McKernan 2020).

As a result, President Erdogan announced that his country would not stop refugees from reaching Europe, thus effectively withdrawing from the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal. In his own words: "After we opened the doors, there were multiple calls saying, 'close the doors', I told

them, ‘It is done. It is finished. The doors are now open. Now, you [Europe] will have to take your share of the burden’ (e-kathimerini.com 2020).

It becomes therefore clear that the subsequent border crisis between Greece and Turkey was not created in a vacuum but rather had its roots in the 2016 Deal and other geopolitical events in the region. The EU would now face the consequences of its externalization of migration governance to third countries.

Greece’s Response

Simultaneously with President Erdogan’s announcement, the number of migrants and refugees at the Greek-Turkish border began to increase. In contrast to earlier times, the attempts to cross into the EU were not concentrated on the islands, but on the land border between Greece and Turkey, which is separated by the Evros River (Meriç in Turkish). Unlike sea borders, which are difficult to guard against irregular trespassing, a large section of the land border already had a border wall, which was swiftly reinforced.

Greece’s government’s first official reaction came from Prime Minister Mitsotakis, who announced that:

“Significant numbers of migrants and refugees have gathered in large groups at the Greek-Turkish land border and have attempted to enter the country illegally. I want to be clear: no illegal entries into Greece will be tolerated. We are increasing our border security” (Prime Minister GR 2020).

Concrete and extraordinary measures, an element of securitization, followed suit. On March 1, the Greek National Security Council announced the suspension of the right to apply for asylum for new arrivals for one month. The decree adopted by the Greek government also foresaw the immediate deportation of those who entered Greece irregularly. This highly controversial measure was criticized by human rights organizations. UNHCR who commented on the issue stated: “neither the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor EU refugee law provides any legal basis for the suspension of the reception of asylum applications” (UNHCR 2020).

In addition to the legal framework that made it harder for refugees to enter Greece, physical barriers were also deployed. The Greek Armed Forces and riot police forces were sent to obstruct and deter people from crossing the border. At the same time, these forces used tear gas, water cannons, and fired warning shots (Smith and Oltermann 2020). This depicts an

extraordinary situation where almost the whole state apparatus was being mobilized. Therefore, even without analyzing the discourse of the political actors, it is clear that securitization was taking place, as extraordinary measures were implemented to deal with a situation that at first glance was not a traditional security threat, as the people attempting to cross the border were unarmed. This becomes especially clear when comparing it to the situation of 2015, when a much higher number of people crossed the Greek border via Turkey. At that time, none of those extraordinary measures, legal or physical, were implemented.

The Securitization of Migration as a Hybrid Threat

It would be too simple to attribute Greece's tough response only on the anti-foreign and anti-migrant sentiment in the country. As will become clear, this is also related to the Greek-Turkish relations, which have historically been tense. Therefore, during the border crisis, the attempted influx was framed as a 'Hybrid Threat' that was part of a broader 'Hybrid Warfare' attempt by Turkey against Greece. This justified the implementation of extraordinary measures, as the influx was seen as undermining the national security of Greece.

This sentiment was shared in the highest level of government, as even Prime Minister Mitsotakis made the link between migration and a national security threat. On March 3, during a visit to the border, he made the following statement at a press conference:

“Dear friends, this is no longer a refugee and migration problem. It is an asymmetrical threat against Greece's Eastern borders, which are also European borders. The unlawful entry of thousands of people turns into a breach of our sovereign territory, with people of unknown origin and unknown purposes at the forefront, who do not hesitate to blatantly use violence to enter Greek territory. They throw tear gas used by the Turkish army. It is my responsibility to safeguard the integrity and sovereignty of my country, and I intend to do that”. (primeminister.gr 2020).

Although not explicitly using the term 'hybrid threat', PM Mitsotakis elevated the threat beyond migration and indirectly accused the Turkish Armed Forces of being involved in the process. This is a clear example of the securitization 'speech act' mentioned in the theoretical framework. Mitsotakis was the securitizing actor who, being the Prime Minister, had to protect the referent object, Greece. The existential threat in this case was the influx of migrants, which, according to Mitsotakis, posed a danger to Greece's national security. Therefore, extraordinary

measures had to be taken, such as the deployment of the army at the border and the suspension of the right to asylum.

This became the official narrative of the Greek government. Nikolas Panagiotopoulos, the Minister of Defense at the time, explicitly used the term ‘hybrid threat’, stating: “The massive and organized movement of populations to our borders, is a real invasion and a hybrid threat, that aims to destabilize our country and is instigated by Turkey” (Skoularakos 2021).

Similarly, the Minister of Citizen Protection, in charge of the police and the coast guard, directly accused Turkey of the events. According to him, "Thousands of miserable people are crowded at our borders. They have not come here on their own. They are being driven away, pushed back, and used by the neighboring country, Turkey." (ibid.). The discourse of Greek officials portrayed the situation as a coordinated attack, framing migration as a weapon used by Turkey, triggering anti-Turkish sentiments present in parts of Greek society. Therefore, the 2020 border crisis should not just be seen as an attempt by migrants to cross into the EU. According to the Greek side, it was much more than that.

The EU's Position

Greece's handling of the situation was directly supported by the EU. Although it was incompatible with the normative image of the EU, the country got plenty of moral and financial support to deal with the attempted influx of migrants. On March 3, in the middle of the ongoing crisis, the highest possible EU delegation visited the Greek-Turkish border, consisting of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission; Charles Michel, President of the European Council; and David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament. High Representative Josep Borrell was not present, as he was visiting Ankara to express the EU's position to the Turkish government (primeminister.gr 2020).

During their visit, the European officials framed Greece as a protector of European sovereignty and stability, rather than a violator of human rights. For instance, in a press conference, Von der Leyen thanked Greece “for being our European *ασπίδα* [English: shield] in these times” (European Commission 2020b). In the same manner, Charles Michel stated: “I would also like to express our support for all that you did with your security services, with your team, with your government” (primeminister.gr 2020). However, compared to the Greek officials, the European ones kept a softer tone. On the one hand, they pointed out that Turkey should adhere to the agreements made under the 2016 Deal and warned that a failure to do so would provoke a strong and united response (ibid.). On the other hand, they avoided using

direct securitizing terms such as that migrants constituted a ‘threat’ or a form of ‘hybrid warfare’ (ibid.).

Nonetheless, the EU was indirectly responsible, as it supported Greece’s actions, some of which were controversial, against migrants and refugees. More specifically, in addition to moral support, the EU Commission offered additional border guards and equipment via the Frontex agency. Furthermore, it provided Greece with 700 million euros in financial assistance for border protection and migration management (ibid.).

Continuity and Escalation

With the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, EU migration governance did not break with its past securitizing logic, which was established with the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal. On the contrary, it was reinforced, as in both moments the focus laid on containment and deterrence, rather than on the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees. While prior to the events of February and March 2020, migration governance had been primarily concentrated on the Aegean Islands, these practices were expanded to the land border between Greece and Turkey following the crisis.

This shift made the militarization more visible. In contrast to the sea border, previously the main route used to enter Greece, the land border was more easily reinforced with barbed wire, tear gas, and the deployment of military forces to actively prevent crossings. This approach was openly supported by the EU, as shown by the visit of three EU officials to the border and the promise of increased support through Frontex, which further legitimized the militarized response as necessary and justified.

This development can clearly be attributed to the securitizing discourse used by Greek officials. Instead of portraying migrants as individuals entitled to protection under international law, they framed them as a weapon used by Turkey to put pressure on Greece and the EU. In contrast, during the previous migration crisis of 2015, when Alexis Tsipras was the Prime Minister, this was not the case. This framing helped justify the implementation of extraordinary measures to deal with the ‘threat’, which is an important element of securitization. With this approach, Greece became a ‘shield’ rather than just a ‘buffer zone’ like it became after the ‘hotspot approach’, which was a consequence of the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal.

Therefore, it becomes clear that the 2020 crisis reinforced the securitized logic that was already established in 2016. Simultaneously, Greece’s role in migration governance reflects the broader EU strategy of externalization and securitization. Now it is time to look whether the

2026 EU Migration Pact and its key provisions are in the same line or follow a different, more humanitarian direction.

Chapter 7: The 2026 EU Migration Pact

According to this chapter, the 2026 Pact is the EU's most ambitious migration reform since the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It is a response to the 2015 migration 'crisis', rising populism, and EU-level political deadlock. The Pact, however, has faced criticism for some of its provisions that institutionalize the securitized migration governance, which according to this thesis, were first introduced with the 2016 Deal and reinforced during the 2020 border crisis. This chapter will show how this happens, once again through discourse of high-level EU officials and through the institutionalization of measures that before have been considered extraordinary. Simultaneously, it traces Greece's role in this process up until June 2025, to find out whether the Pact has already influenced Greek migration management.

Overview and Origins of the Pact

EU cooperation on migration already existed prior to the Pact with the introduction of CEAS in 1999. However, the 2015 migration crisis highlighted the old system's flaws, and therefore, the EU came to the conclusion that a new framework was necessary. As early as May 2015, the European Commission presented its new 'European Agenda on Migration', which can be seen as a forerunner to the 2026 Pact. The agenda was based on four pillars: reducing the incentives of irregular migration, better border management via Frontex, establishing a strong common asylum policy that included a common list of 'safe countries of origin', and introducing a new policy on legal migration (European Commission 2015).

In 2020, the new European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen launched the 'European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum', aiming to strengthen the Commission's position regarding migration governance and to further improve coordination between member states (Spehar 2025). In April 2024, the European Parliament voted in favor of the pact, and in May 2024, it was formally endorsed by the European Council, passing through a qualified majority with only Hungary and Poland voting against it. The Pact entered into force on June 11, 2024, and will fully enter into application from July 1, 2026 (European Commission 2024).

According to the European Commission, the Pact's "firm but fair rules are designed to manage and normalize migration for the long term," aiming to support EU member-states in this process, while also providing "safeguards to protect people in need" (ibid.). However, the Pact has faced strong criticism for not being grounded in normative values, but rather that it provides a framework that undermines them. According to Sarah Wolff, the Pact and its key provisions go against the normative and liberal values of the EU and are based on "the rise of

far right antiimmigrant ideas and an alignment of EU institutions and EU member states to deliver a credible reform in the eyes of European public opinion” (Wolff 2024: 2). Similar views are expressed by Daniel Thym, who argues that the Pact is an exercise in ‘European Realpolitik’ that was based on pragmatism rather than on values (2022). Due to, growing anti-EU sentiment across Europe, the Commission had to consider the voices of hardliners on migration, such as the Visegrad group (ibid.).

The Pact’s Provisions

According to the Commission, the EU’s new migration and asylum policy is built on four pillars, each with specific goals aiming to correct structural weaknesses in the EU’s previous migration governance model (European Commission 2024):

1. Securing the EU’s external borders

The first pillar introduces a new mandatory screening process. According to this process, all irregular arrivals will be screened within 7 days at the EU external borders. The screening will verify the person’s identity, health, security status, and vulnerability. This will be based on the already existing Eurodac fingerprint database, which will be upgraded. The Pact also establishes new accelerated border asylum procedure for those who do not meet the entry conditions. Within 12 weeks it should assess whether the applicant is eligible for protection. If this is not the case, according to the Pact’s provision, the individual will be placed in a return border procedure and ultimately be deported to their home country. This pillar aims to centralize the process that in the pre-Pact era fell on the national asylum systems of individual member states. This often led to uncoordinated national policies which ultimately undermined the Dublin Regulation and the Schengen Treaty. With this pillar, the EU aims to reinforce the containment model by keeping potential asylum seekers at its external border.

2. Fast and efficient Asylum procedures

The second pillar aims to better coordinate asylum and reception conditions across member states. It sets standards on how applications should be processed, who qualifies for protection, and what care should be provided. Prior to the Pact, the legal and procedural situation differed significantly between member states. As a result, ‘asylum shopping’ occurred. In other words, this means that asylum seekers apply for international protection in multiple EU countries and in this manner chose their preferred country. This created a situation where some countries received more asylum

applications than others. The 2026 Pact, therefore, seeks to promote a fairer burden sharing with the Common European Asylum System.

3. Effective System of Solidarity and Responsibility

One of the most significant changes the new Pact introduces is the establishment of the mandatory solidarity mechanisms aimed at sharing the ‘burden’ of migration across the EU, not just among border states. This means that member states have three options to contribute: accepting relocated asylum seekers, offering operational support to the EU’s migration governance through personnel or infrastructure, or providing a financial contribution set at €20,000 for each asylum seeker assigned but not accepted. As a result, this provision changes the Dublin III framework. Although, according to the Pact, asylum seekers must still apply for international protection in the EU country of first entry, what changes is that through the new EU Asylum and Migration Management Regulation (AMMR) they will be assigned to other EU countries, aiming to ease pressure on frontline states.

4. Embedding migration in international partnerships

According to the fourth pillar, the Pact is not only based on intra-European cooperation but also on cooperation with partner countries. These countries will be responsible for cooperating with the EU to block irregular departures and to combat migrant smuggling. Similarly, the EU will establish partnerships with third countries for the return and readmission of nationals who were not granted asylum. In a sense, this aligns with previous deals made by the EU, such as for instance the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal. To prevent third countries from using migration as a leverage tool the Pact introduces the ‘Crisis and Force Majeure’. This will enable faster allocation of EU resources and create a cooperation framework. This is in contrast with past crises, such as the 2015 migration crisis and the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, which were managed through ad hoc measures.

The Pact’s Migration Governance and Securitization

Margaritis Schinas, from 2019 until 2024 the Vice-President of the European Commission, presented the Pact to the public in September 2020. When describing the Pact, he used a metaphor of a three-story building (European Commission 2020). According to him, the first floor represented deals with third countries to manage migration at the source, thus externalizing the issue outside of EU borders. The second floor involved better border management and can be seen as the next step when deals with third countries fail to deter or

prevent migrants from moving into the EU (ibid.). This is planned to happen through the deployment of Frontex and through more efficient screening databases that will enable fast-tracked border procedures, aimed at preventing irregular migration flows from crossing the border and moving into the EU. The third and last floor corresponds to the mandatory solidarity mechanism of the Pact's third pillar, which promotes internal solidarity and fair burden sharing among member states (ibid.).

The Pact and its presentation make clear that the securitized governance logic is reinforced. The Pact's main aim, as described in Schinas' three-story building metaphor, is to build a framework that will control the influx of migrants through a multilevel process. When it comes to securitization, it is not necessarily the discourse used, but rather the exceptional measures taken to deal with migrants and refugees. For instance, Schinas's first floor, which corresponds to the Pact's fourth pillar, formalizes externalization by stating that deals with third countries are necessary for the protection of EU borders. As a result, agreements such as the 2016 Deal with Turkey, which has proven controversial, will become institutionalized.

The deterrence does not stop there and goes further as described in Schinas' second floor, which matches the Pact's first pillar. Besides the reinforcement of Frontex, the already existing mandatory screening will be reinforced, demonstrating that the EU is initiating firmer control of its external borders. A border, as described in the theoretical framework, is not only a physical one represented by walls and barbed wire, but biometric databases also constitute its reinforcement. In addition, Schinas announced that the return policy will become stricter because "on average every year around 370,000 applications for international protection are rejected in the EU, but only around a third of these persons are returned home [and] this has to change" (European Commission 2020c). The Pact plans to tighten the grip on persons ordered to leave the EU and will give authorities more powers to achieve their deportation (European Commission 2025).

In the fourth pillar there is the 'Crisis and Force Majeure' clause which "it would provide for temporary and extraordinary measures needed in the face of crisis" as acknowledged by the official document presenting the Pact (European Commission 2020d: 11). This approach elevates migration to a security threat rather than just the movement of people across borders. It highlights that the language of emergency, control, and threat continues to dominate EU migration discourse (Stepka 2023). We can also see this back in Schinas' presentation, where he calls for the "Robust management of our external borders" (European Commission 2020c).

Greece's Role in Implementing the Pact

Due to its geographical position, Greece has been the epicenter of past experimental practices. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the Pact's presence will be felt earlier than July 2026, when the Pact will be officially implemented.

The Greek government's first reaction to the Pact was positive, claiming that the EU member states at its external border would benefit from it (Georgiopoulou and Voudouri 2023). The mandatory 'Solidarity Mechanism' was seen as an important clause, as it would distribute the 'burden' more evenly across the EU (ibid.). According to then-Minister of Immigration and Asylum Dimitris Kairidis, it was important that, with the Pact "the EU recognized the threat posed by the instrumentalization of migration and acquired ways to address its consequences" (ibid.). This statement was directly pointed at Turkey, which, according to the Greek government has instrumentalized migration for its own benefit, as happened in 2020 during the border crisis (ibid.). In the first months after the Pact's official ratification did not lead to any substantial changes in Greece's position towards migration.

This changed a couple of months ago, as from January 2025 onwards, Greece has adopted stricter migration management and plans to adopt a bill to anchor this legislation. The appointment of Makis Voridis as Minister of Immigration and Asylum signifies this, as he is well known in Greece for his far-right, nationalistic, and anti-immigration views (Smith 2025). However, the tougher stance Greece took last month should not be seen as an exclusive domestic phenomenon, as other EU member states, especially Germany, are pressuring Greece. This is because many of the around 40,000 people who are granted refugee status in Greece every year are taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by the residence permit they are given and legally move to other member states (Meinardus 2025). Everything indicates that this door will soon be closed, while at the same time, the migrant arrivals into Greece continue (ibid.).

This puts Greece in a difficult position as domestic pressure is mounting because the current center-right government, as seen previously in the thesis, has built its public image on its tough stance on irregular migration. Consequently, a new draft law was announced by Minister Voridis in May 2025, stating that anyone arrested in Greece without papers will be punished with a prison sentence of up to three years and a fine of up to €10,000. The detention period, which currently has a limit of 18 months, will be extended to two years, while the possibility of further extension for security reasons is also foreseen. There will be no possibility of commutation or suspension of the sentence, unless the convicted third-country national declares a willingness to voluntarily depart from Greece. According to the country's judiciary

system, illegal immigrants are considered all those who have their asylum request rejected at first and second instance (Georgiopolou 2025).

These national measures clearly adopt some of the 2026 Pact's provisions as they emphasize on returns, deterrence, and external border enforcement. Simultaneously, Minister Vouridis emphasized that the deportation of rejected asylum seekers should become more common. "We need a more effective and functional return framework. Without returns, any migration policy is meaningless", he told Greek media (Kathimerini.gr 2025). This is in line with the Pact's provisions, which aim to speed up asylum procedures and the deportation of rejected applicants.

At the same time, it would be logical to expect that the Pact eases pressure on frontline states through the newly introduced solidarity mechanisms. Looking at Greece, this is not the case, as the Greek government is sharpening its laws out of fear that it will have to deal with the influx of migrants alone. The official implementation of the Pact in July 2026 will show whether this will change; until then, it is only possible to speculate. Spyros-Vlad Oikonomou, an expert on migration in Greece from the Greek Council of Refugees who was interviewed for this thesis, stated that:

"As for whether the Pact promotes solidarity, I would say more that it makes clear the inability of finding a common path at the Union level, but also the acceptance of this impossibility. In reality, the so-called solidarity mechanism, instead of predictability, introduces into the European legal order a permanent negotiation mechanism between member states" (Oikonomou 2025).

Thus, there are indications that the Greek government is not reassured by the guarantees given by the solidarity mechanism. While the stricter laws introduced cannot be directly linked to the Pact's implementation, it is clear that the Pact also does not ease the security-first driven approach, adopted by Greece after 2016, but rather institutionalizes it.

Chapter 8: Analysis

This chapter brings together the findings of the previous three chapters (5-7). It analyzes the continuity and change of the past decade's EU migration governance and examines how the 2026 Pact relates to prior securitizing policies. What this shows is that the formation of the Pact was a securitized process and therefore did not emerge out of nowhere. The chapter ends by addressing the research question on whether the Pact reinforces the security-driven governance model introduced in 2016.

Continuities and Discontinuities in EU Migration Governance

The previous chapters focused on individual events that, as this thesis explains, reinforced the securitizing trajectory of migration management. This nine-year period saw many changes in Greece and EU policies that built up to the 2026 Migration Pact. Now, it is time to focus on which policy elements remained consistent and which changed over time, with a focus on the securitization of migration governance and Greece's role.

First, the thesis made clear that securitization as a core policy logic exists and continues to exist in migration governance. Migration continues to be framed as a security threat, if not directly, such as during the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, then indirectly through provisions of the Pact, such as the 'Crisis and Force Majeure' clause. This clause, in other words, aims to prepare the EU and its member states for the 'dangers' of uncontrolled migration flows and works as a crisis response mechanism that will allow derogations from normal asylum rules. In practice, this means a persistent emphasis on border control, deterrence, and rapid returns, measures that were taken as ad hoc responses in 2016 and 2020 and are institutionalized with the Pact. The 'hotspot approach', introduced on the Aegean islands in 2016, remains central, as the identification of migrants and refugees at the outside borders of the EU is, according to the Pact, an effective way to deter and counter irregular migration.

Second, the externalization introduced with the 2016 Deal, through which migration control was transferred to Turkey, remains central. Deals with third countries have been further expanded and even became a central pillar of the 2026 Pact, making externalization a key aspect of EU border management. Third, regarding the role of Greece, its status as a border state remains unchanged. After the failure of the 2016 Deal's return clause to be implemented, and particularly after the events of 2020, Greece saw itself as 'the EU's shield', with the blessings of the EU. According to the clauses of the new Pact, this will remain the same, as the EU's

external borders will be reinforced and the identification and asylum applications will still take place there, thus, at the Greek-Turkish border.

When it comes to discontinuities, the Pact offers some institutional changes. First, in contrast to the past, it offers a formal EU framework for migration governance. Instead of emergency-driven, ad hoc policies, the Pact brings a system of clear and predictable rules. At the same time, differences between member states will be minimized, as the Pact's first and second pillar aim for harmonized asylum procedures. According to the Commission, it will also protect the refugees' rights, as the Pact provides legal guarantees and complaint mechanisms. In contrast, as shown in the thesis, in the past these responsibilities lay more with the member states, resulting in large differences between them. Second, and in line with this, the new solidarity mechanisms attempt to share the 'burden' of migration governance among all member states, instead of placing it mainly on the border states, such as Greece, during the 2015 and 2020 crises.

The Pact, despite the new provisions it brings, represents an evolution rather than a break, because it legitimizes securitization, and at the same time, adds legal clarity and harmonization across the EU.

Securitization Trajectory

The thesis' main objective is to prove that securitization of migration is an evolving process. Therefore, it argues that it is impossible to examine the 2026 Pact and its provisions without taking past events into account. The 2015 migration crisis, the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal and the 2020 Greek-Turkish border crisis, all contributed to the further securitization of EU migration governance.

More specifically, when looking at the events of 2015, it becomes clear that the humanitarian issue, and the lack of solidarity between member states served as a wakeup call for the Union. From then onwards, migration is seen as an issue that may endanger the EU's very existence. This can be traced back to the fifth chapter, when Jean-Claude Juncker, in 2015, warned for the disintegration of Schengen, if extra measures would not be taken. This change of mindset regarding migration enabled the EU to move from a more humanitarian to a more security-oriented approach.

The 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, through which the influx of migrants and refugees from Turkey into Greece dropped drastically, can be seen as a direct consequence to this. However, it also was a turning point in the EU's approach to migration governance by establishing de facto external border control. Migrants and refugees were externalized outside of EU territory

to Turkey, while those who managed to reach the EU were contained on the Greek islands through the ‘hotspot approach’, sometimes for years and often in dire conditions where their fundamental rights, including the right to asylum, were not respected. Therefore, the Deal created a situation where Greece became a testing ground for extraordinary measures that enabled deterrence-based measures in migration management.

The sixth chapter shows that these measures were further reinforced during the Greece-Turkey border crisis of February and March 2020. The Greek government under PM Mitsotakis responded quickly to the attempted influx of migrants, desperately wanting to prevent a recurrence of 2015. During the crisis, Securitization was used through discourse and practice, as high-level Greek official, like the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense, mobilized securitizing discourse. At the same time, extraordinary measures were also taken. Securitized migration governance was reinforced by border closures and pushbacks, while even the unprecedented suspension of asylum was implemented. Greece’s approach was backed by the EU and the country presented itself, in Ursula von der Leyen’s words, as the “shield of Europe”. Nevertheless, the crisis exposed the weaknesses of EU migration governance and intensified the need for structural reform.

This structural reform came in the form of the much-negotiated 2026 EU Pact, which aimed to replace ad hoc measures with predictable and harmonized rules. Although according to the Commission, the Pact’s key provisions were safeguarding the rights of refugees, the third chapter of the thesis’ research part demonstrated that, in reality, it consolidated prior practices into binding EU law, thereby embedding securitization. The EU’s external borders are further reinforced, physically but also via modern databases. A crisis regulation applies in case the system is overwhelmed, and greater emphasis is placed on the deportation of denied asylum applicants. In this way, the EU has learned from previous, often extraordinary measures and institutionalized them through the Pact, making securitization systemic.

Implications: Reinforcement or Departure

Another aspect that this case study attempts to show is that there exists an obvious interplay between EU migration governance and the implementation of the measures by the EU member states. At the same time, this also goes the other way around, as extraordinary measures taken by border states have been adopted by the EU’s migration policy, showing a clear two-way relationship.

Greece, as an EU border state, has developed its own approach to managing the influx of migrants. The policy of deterrence, which began as a crisis response, includes actions such

as pushbacks, which are generally condemned but tolerated by the EU, to the ‘hotspot approach’, which was not a Greek idea, but was rather imposed on Greece after the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal. In the middle ground, we can place the events of 2020, when the strong and militarized Greek response was openly supported by the EU. We thus see that the applied securitization logic is created through an interplay between the EU’s and Greece’s actions, setting precedents for the 2026 Pact.

To answer the central question, it is clear that the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal introduced and new securitized logic as a solution in dealing with the influx of refugees and migrants on EU territory. The 2026 Pact legalizes and extends these mechanisms EU-wide, especially through fast-track border procedures and crisis protocols. The thesis identified three key moments that established this trajectory. At the first stage, from 2016 onwards, Greece implements containment and deterrence according to the EU-Turkey Deal. When this Deal fell apart due to Turkey’s unwillingness to cooperate, Greece reinforces its securitized response during the 2020 border crisis and receives EU praise and is even positively characterized as “Europe’s shield”. The last phase is happening as we speak, as Greece in anticipation to the Pact has adopted stricter domestic laws. This is in line with the Pact’s provisions which formalize similar measures, like stricter border control and deportations, thus legitimizing prior Greek practices.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the 2026 Pact does not affect Greece’s securitizing approach. On the contrary, it rather embeds it in EU law. Thus, despite the European Commission’s promise that the Pact would introduce a more humanitarian approach, in practice, at least for the case of Greece, it reinforces rather than challenges the security-first approach.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

According to the thesis, migration governance in the EU has followed a consistent path towards securitization. In short, it was established by the 2016 EU-Turkey Deal, then reinforced by the 2020 border crisis and finally institutionalized by the 2026 Migration Pact. During this period, Greece not only acquired the status of a buffer state but also became a laboratory for policies and measures developed in coordination with Brussels. The 2026 Pact should not be viewed as a transformation, but rather as a consolidation of previously exceptional crisis measures into EU norms, built directly on the foundations laid in 2016 and 2020.

Therefore, it is valid to argue that securitization has been, continues to be, and will likely remain a central feature of EU migration governance and that of its member states. Securitization is not limited to rhetoric, commonly analyzed through ‘speech-act’, but extends further than that, being embedded in policy and law. At the same time, in line with Border Theory, the thesis also demonstrated that borders are dynamic spaces where top-down measures are implemented, serving as the point of translation between high-level EU policymaking and on-the-ground implementation. In particular, the Greek-Turkish border has been the site of exceptional measures taken, such as the ‘hotspot approach’ established by the 2016 Deal, and the forceful obstruction of migrants and refugees attempting to enter Greece in 2020. These developments offer undeniable proof that securitizing logic is present at the Greek border.

In direct response to the research question, by connecting this situation to the 2026 Pact, it becomes evident that the Pact reinforces this logic for several reasons. First, external borders and detention regimes are being further strengthened. Second, the externalization of migration governance to third countries is expanding beyond Turkey. The Pact continues to frame migration as a security threat. In other words, it codifies practices first introduced under exceptional circumstances and scales them up into binding EU-wide rules. At the same time, while the newly introduced solidarity mechanism aims to distribute the pressure among all member states, not only the EU border states, but this thesis has also shown that in the case of Greece, as of June 2025, this has not reassured the Greek government of stronger European solidarity to ease the pressure. On the contrary, new laws proposed by the Greek Ministry of Migration are increasing penalties on irregular migrants residing in the country, suggesting that Greece fears being left to manage the influx alone and does not trust the solidarity mechanism.

It will be interesting to investigate in future research whether this will change after the full implementation of the Pact in July 2026 and whether we are now in a transitional phase. At the same time, while this case study focused only on Greece, it will be important to examine

how other EU-member states respond to the Pact and whether their securitized approaches, also evident at the Eastern EU border, such as between Poland and Belarus, will remain or begin to shift.

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