THESES OF THE PhD DISSERTATION
of
Péter Stepper

Forced Migration as a Security Challenge in Central Europe:
Differing Perceptions, Common Position in V4

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1. Research History and Justification of Topic

Various arguments were made about international migration in the scientific debates, but security policy aspects of the phenomena still remained unexplained. In the past few years, international migration and especially forced migration appeared on the political agenda as a security risk more and more frequently (Bigo, 2008, Huysmans 2006 Guild 2009).

Irregular migration differs significantly from other forms of immigration, because of the motives of movement, which most of the times consists of political, economic or societal forces to leave your former habitual residence (IOM, 2004). 65.3 million people can be considered as forced migrants compared to the overall number of global migration, which is 243 million annually. On the hand they are one of the greatest numbers ever, on the other hand we shall not forget this amount of people is still fewer than the 1% of the Earth’s population. Europe became affected by forced migration heavily and as unprecedented way in 2015, when more than 1 million people crossed the Schengen borders. In term of forced migration, undocumented people and smugglers have always been a matter security concerns, but the securitization of refugees is definitely a new element in the field of research (Watson 2009).

Securitization can be understood as a process, when a highly politicized issues area moves beyond the limits of normal, democratic way of thinking and extraordinary measures can be taken in order to ensure survival. Recently, forced migration is a security challenge for European politics. I will examine forced migration to the EU since 1999 to understand how this securitization took place in Central Europe and especially in the Visegrad region.

2. Methods Used

The hypothesis of my dissertation is that

the norm community of the European Union has been collapsed in term of forced migration, which was a field with high political salience. V4 Group securitized the humanitarian and refugee crisis of 2015, which resulted in the security dominated understand of migration politics in the European Union, where political position is determined by the discourse and narratives towards the phenomena and not by material facts of international migration.

In order to prove my point, it made sense to differentiate and use three distinctive sub-hypothesis and to analyze them separately.
H1: The EU is a normative community since the establishment of CEAS, because the level of integration in this policy field remained low, common rules were established but only partially implemented in domestic legal practices.

H2: Member-states agreed on new legislation on EU level, if the specific field has its high political salience and they could use the new EU legislation to support their security narrative. This explains H1, because the rules accepted without explicit political support remained mere political declaration than real action in terms of managing forced migration.

H3: Security perceptions are the key to shape political debates and the media discourse could effectively alter a humanitarian narrative into a securitized one.

If H1 can be proved to be true, and media narrative could effectively shape a security narrative regarding forced migration, the normative community will disintegrate. Positive results concerning H2 would highlight the importance of the V4 regional group, which is a vocal supporter of the security narrative.

The independent variables are the new institution and practices created by the restrictive and security oriented legislation (detention of asylum seekers, strengthening border control and visa policy, EU-NATO cooperation in term of military operations on the Mediterranean Sea) and the dependent variable is the level of securitization of force migrants. I will use deduction and multidisciplinary approach in term of my academic toolbox, I used sources of international law, refugee law, forced migration studies, critical security studies and international relations studies. The unit of analysis consist of documents related to the chosen case study (V4 Group declarations, UNCHR and EUROSTAT database etc.), which are significant in terms of understanding the context and the discourse.

During my research I used three distinctive scientific methods, longitudinal analysis, integration measurement and discourse analysis. Longitudinal analysis of two different time periods revealed the connections between high salience and establishment of new legislation in European politics. At first I examined the era of 1999-2004, then the post-accession period of the Visegrad Group. The first period was determined by the Barroso led EU Commission, while the recent era of EU politics is marked by the agenda-setting activity of Jean-Claude Juncker. It was a clear correlation in terms of salience legislation and restrictiveness of the new rules. IN order to prove the hypothesis I needed to understand international and European cooperation in the field of forced migration, so that was the purpose of these chapter of the thesis.
The second method of understanding the level of EU integration focused on forced migration legislation and the harmonization steps of the member-states. On the one hand, there were a lot of rules adopted in the field of asylum policy in the EU, which resulted a narrow space for political maneuvers of the nation-states. On the other hand, the research revealed the flaws of integration and claims to understand asylum policy as an under-integrated policy field of the EU despite the efforts since 1999. Either restrictive, or expansive European minimum standards we are talking about, it is important to see how much these were adopted in reality and thesis proved they were not. Previous research focused on the equality of burden-sharing in terms of reception and it all concluded that inequality will cause political problems eventually. Quantitative methods serve the purpose of proving sub-hypotheses that forced migration is salient political topic and tis salience effect decision-making. Measuring the level of integration reveals how successful EU harmonization was in the distinct time period.

The third method, discourse analysis focused on political narrative toward forced migration in the Visergrad countries before and after 2015, the year of the great refugee crisis of the European Union. It revealed that forced migration is a securitized issue indeed, and the refugee discourses appeared in almost all of the security (military, political, societal, economic, and environmental) sectors identified by Copenhagen School (Buzan et al. [1998]). Examining a phenomena though texts supposes that the analysis would shed light on the importance of certain historical societal and cultural dimensions of the field, This methodology stands firmly on the ground of constructivist understanding of world political and believes that securitizing actors creates narratives through the toolbox of language in order to shape reality and it manifested in foreign policy decision (Geertz [1972]

The thesis shed light on the specifics and similarities of discourse on refugees in the V4 countries and perhaps it reveals some differences in terms of the securitization process in inter- and intra-Visegrad politics. Research relied upon primary data collection, database analysis, statistics, political declarations and statements, ethnography, international and European legal documents, scientific paper and journal articles related to force migration in Central Europe.

3. Results of Dissertation

Before I summarize the results of my thesis, I would like to overview the steps of the research. The chapters intended to show the rationale, the methodology and hypotheses of the thesis concluded that forced migration became a global phenomenon and a hot potato of European politics. It is definitely on the top of the agenda and it is worth to examine the reasons
and context beyond certain political decisions to understand the nature of forced migration. Even if international migration is global, still not a phenomena happening *en masse*. Relatively small amount of people (less than 1% of the Earth’s population) are forced to leave their homes annually, but the number of refugees are still increasing. It is a legitimate and important question, what solutions can be established to manage global migration flows.

In order to answer for the abstract question of how forced migration is depicted in world politics and which advantages/disadvantages connoted to this term, theories of international relations could give various answers. How deeply embedded forced migration is in world politics and what can actors do to reduce its volume and negative effects? What can be the limits of international politics in terms of forced migration? The literature review chapter compared various understanding of international politics to see how scholar identified the problem since the 1950s. Liberal and institutionalist approach of international politics is a useful toolbox to analyze the work of institutions and regimes such as the UNHCR and to show the reasons of the results and failures of a numerous institutions working in this field. However, it was inevitable that out of his own safe zone (i.e. regimes and institutions), liberal approach could not give a satisfactory explanation for several symptoms, like the under-integrated field of asylum policy in the EU or the lack of trust among member-states during the refugee crisis in 2015.

The next subchapter used the realist toolbox to show how important part of power politics refugees can be. Armed conflicts among nation-states have always been the core of international politics and refugees appeared on the radar as effective tools of political influence. During thred Cold War, the West used refugees to show the horrors of Communism, while the Soviet Union used to destabilize western allies in the rest of the world. Refugees were to be understood as a group of potential liberation fighter, who can be armed in the proxy wars of great powers. Therefore armed groups could be understand as security challenges, but these risks was originally made by another rogue state. There is an evident flaw regarding both (liberal and realist) theories that they cannot understand dynamics, only the static conditions of international politics. Realists see refugees are a tool/security risk, while institutionalists see them as a new area of potential cooperation, where regimes can be established in order to (re)gain trust among partners in international relations. This trust is essential to be able to work on global solutions and achieve results in terms of public goods. These theories are able to understand a period when the normative community (like the EU) has a common perception towards a problem (like refugees). Liberal approach works in the early stages of the integration, when small group of
member-states understood on the necessity of institution building in the field of asylum policy. Realism is useful if we focus only on the border-states, which are effected by refugee inflow and they want to protect their borders and sovereignty.

However these theories are not good enough to understand differing perceptions of states, which either support common measures based on solidarity or suggest strengthening borders and take all security measures needed to tackle the challenges. The European Unions is a specific subject of international relations, which can show unprecedented results of cooperation but still cannot be considered as a supranational entity. EU has to choose between developing forward into a more federative way or to stay a confederation of nation-state. On the one hand EU strives to take measures to adopt a common European asylum policy since the 1990s, so it is an epistemic normative community, which members share a common sense on what is understood as forced migration. Forced migration, in this sense is a problem to tackle, because it can destabilize entire regions and cause human suffering all around the world. Managing migratory movements are an important challenges and it shall be done by international cooperation. Such understanding of the problem coincides with the liberal premises. On the other hand, results of international cooperation are more than questionable so far. There is still a lot of room for policy harmonization and more and more differences have been revealed after 2012. These difference among member-states are able to destroy the epistemic normative community, while a certain group of countries see migration as an opportunity, while others see it as a security threat for their mere existence. Because none of the aforementioned theories are able to explain the problem, I turned to field of critical security studies.

In chapter 2.3, I reviewed the history of critical security studies and tried to figure out what part of this field can serve as an added value to my research. Deepening and widening the concept of security was essential, to even talk about force migration as a security challenges in Europe, where traditional security threats were only military forces and other army related activates traditionally. Earlier the states mainly focused on forced migrants as potential armed groups living in refugee camps (e.g. in Uganda only waiting for their return to Rwanda) and this perception was connected to the military understanding of security policy. In the 1990s it has changed dramatically and the fears from long-term integration problems overarched the ad hoc risks stemming from armed groups armed in refugee camps at remote places.

In the field of critical security studies, post-modern (Bigo, Huysmans) political thinkers (in the footsteps of Foucault) focused on the relation between fearmongering and power considering forced migration. This approach is not suitable for the basic question of my
research, i.e. why the epistemic normative community of the EU member-states started to dismantle after 2015. Instead of the premises of the so-called Paris school, much more added value can be found if we choose the securitization framework of the Copenhagen school as the basis of my explanatory work. The theory of Buzan et al. has been examined in the 2.4. subchapter, where I found to be proved that this theory serves as an adequate tool for my research. 

Securitization is exactly the process, which describes what has happened in Central Europe regarding force migration.

After the examination of theoretical problems, I introduced the legal and institutional framework of forced migration in the European Union. The research revealed the effects of EU institutions on the development of refugee law in Central European member-states. Among all form of regional cooperation, the European Union is the most advanced in terms of human right guarantees and international protection of refugees. Despite this success, some flaws of integration and backlashes in terms of legal harmonization are quite evident, and huge differences can be seen in the refuge protection practices of the member-states.

These differences has been showed and analyzed in chapter 3.1. and 3.2. Member-states tried to exceed the guarantee system of the universally accepted refugee conventions and worked accordingly. However, the decisions and directives striving to harmonize asylum procedures and develop housing provided only limited results. The initiative to reform the CEAS ended after long negotiation in 2012 and one could feel a sort of exhaustion concerning the mood of EU member-states in terms of any further reform. Disproportionate burden-sharing remained the key problem, though new migration routes opened in the Western Balkan. The global phenomenon of forced migration became an imminent problem for all EU member-states and it was even worse after the 2008 financial crisis. Forced migration and refugees became a topic of high salience and it shaped the public debate. After the financial crisis, migration crisis was the new hot potato of EU politics, and the hope of long-term solutions and consensual decisions vaporized soon, the differences of the positions were bigger than ever.

In the third chapter, I highlighted the reasons, which led to the erosion of the European normative community in the field of refugee policy. Integration measures (CFB) in subchapter 3.3. revealed the different level of harmonization in each member-state. It explains the need of further reform concerning the Dublin system and the other relevant EU legislation, even though the previous reform initiative ended 3 three years ago.
In the chapter 3.4., I examined all of the legislative acts, which were connected to visa policy, border protection, asylum, illegal migration and legal migration. I categorized the aforementioned legislative acts to see if they are rather restrictive or expansive regulations and how political debates influenced their restrictiveness. A former research made by Givens and Luedtke revealed some correlation between high salience and the restrictiveness of certain decisions. I repeated their research with data collected since 2005 to 2016, which more or less resulted in the same consequences. Ministers in the Council of the European Union preferred the legislative acts containing restrictive elements and maximizing security, instead of expanding refugee rights. The correlation between variables and the quantitative method would not expand this process without the qualitative understating based on the theoretical premises of the Copenhagen school.

In chapter 4., after the examination of the refugee system features in each country, I analyzed the joint declaration of the Visegrad Group. In order to see the level of acceptance in terms of securitizing speech acts, I collected all of the relevant public opinion polls. It revealed on which extent securitization was going on, in the field of political, economic and societal dimensions. This theory works in democracies and shows how a political actors could convince the population on his/her security narrative, and how is he/she entitled to introduce extraordinary measures to counter certain threats. This framework has been used to show how V4 head of states, ministry of interiors etc. tried to create join declarations and to describe forced migration as a primary security challenges in Europe. In order to make this work, actor need the political support for imposing extraordinary measures, which have been showed in chapter 4.6. Eurobarometer, Parlameter, TÁRKI and IPSOS polls revealed how the security narrative dominated the population since 2015. The polls highlighted the differences between V4 counties and other EU member-states regarding European asylum policy. V4 population chose to see forced migration as a security threat rather than a humanitarian crisis. However, it is important to see that these differences are not newborn. Previous polls showed results of xenophobia and fear from ethical heterogeneity, so we could not fully connect this results to the recent securitization process.

The position of Poland has been evaluated in chapter 4.1. and it revealed that the country is only a transit region, nothing more. Only 7000 asylum-seekers were the peak before the EU accession, but joining the EU changed the situation slightly. The shift from a few hundreds of refugees to an annual level of few thousands required some reform in the asylum legislation. After 2004, Polish governments tried to hasten the legal harmonization and they had to face
with only a small portion of asylum application, mainly Russian and Ukrainian citizens. Despite the lack of experience with asylum problems, PiS government decided to choose this topic for fear-mongering purposes in 2015. Warsaw rejected every common European solution, which could led to any kind of quota system and they found regional partners in these efforts in the other Visegrad countries. Examining the speech acts revealed that the PM and the minister of interior were the vocal proponents of securitization. The referent object to survive were national security, public order, public health, religions and identity, which were seen to be threatened by refugees with different cultural and ethnical background.

Hungarian position has been analyses in chapter 4.2, which showed that Budapest had quite the same path as Poland, which led to the situation in 2015. There were only a few asylum seekers in the country in the 1990s, but its rate increased after 2004. Budapest supported the EU legal harmonization, adopted the necessary institutions and acts in order to manage asylum policy. The mass inflow of people in 2015 find Budapest unexpected and unprepared. It was a 800% increase comparing to regular numbers. However, we shall not forget that the security narrative on migration and asylum issues started with the adoption of the National Security Strategy in 2012. After the billboards campaigns depicting asylum-seekers as threat to economy, unemployment and cultural values, the position of the Hungarian government was quite evident, and showed the securitization trend of the certain policy field. Despite the other three V4 countries, extraordinary measures were more visible and explicit, the border fence between Serbia and Hungary, as well as the use of military for border protections tasks.

Slovakian asylum policy were examined in chapter 4.3, which showed that a country with only dozens of refugees also chose the path of securitization as the others. PM Fico and minister of interior Kalinak were the main political figures, whose speech acts were analyzed. They highlighted the cultural and religious threats posed by Muslim minorities and firmly rejected the idea to accept any refugees other than Christians.

The Czech Republic had a sort of moderate position on EU asylum policy during the 2015 crisis, but fundamentally supported its V4 partners. Prague also implemented EU norms after 2004 and actually Czechia appeared to be a transit country and not a destination, just in the case of the other three. While PM Sobotka tried to maneuver between a European position based on solidarity, he did not want to oppose hardliner such as president Zeman or Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec. Referent objects were a bit different in Czechia. The mostly atheist Czech population was not afraid of defending Christian values, but they defended their lifestyle threatened by culturally different Muslims.
In light of the facts mentioned above, I proved my hypotheses in the following manner:

H1: The EU is a normative community since the establishment of CEAS, because the level of integration in this policy field remained low, common rules were established but only partially implemented in domestic legal practices.

Proof: Various recognition rates of refugees from the very same countries and circumstances, revealed the significant differences in terms of effective integration of EU asylum policy in 1999-2012. While 30% of the Afghan nationals received refugee status in Austria, this was less than 3% in the Netherlands and less than 10% in Belgium. Eritrean nationals are refugees without any doubt, but differences there are even bigger. 78% of Eritreans received refugee status in Germany, but only 5% of them in Malta. 79% of the Iraqis were welcomed in France, but only 8% of asylum claims were accepted in Great Britain. Chapter 3.3., and the Coffey-Feingold-Bloomberg measure helped to analyze the raw data and to find conclusions. CFB showed some increase in terms of integration success between 1999 and 2004, but after 2004 it turned around. It was because of the new EU member-states and because of the fact that countries were reluctant to fully implement the rules accepted on EU level.

H2: Member-states agreed on new legislation on EU level, if the specific field has its high political salience and they could use the new EU legislation to support their security narrative. This explains H1, because the rules accepted without explicit political support remained mere political declaration than real action in terms of managing forced migration.

Proof: Chapter 3.4. showed that in the field of asylum and borders, still the the intergovernmental approach is the preferable in the EU and the member-states are reluctant to give up their sovereignty for common solutions. However, areas of low-politics proved otherwise and some kind of liberalization has been started regarding unaccompanied minors, women rights etc. On the other hand, high-politics (border protection, visa policy, asylum policy) resulted mostly restrictive regulations to tackle the security challenges. In order to prove this, chapter 3.4 analyzed the proposals of the EU Commission and examined if they were accepted/rejected and restrictive/expansive. The results showed similar correlations than the original research made by Givens and Luedtke in 2005.

H3: Security perceptions are the key to shape political debates and the media discourse could effectively alter a humanitarian narrative into a securitized one.
Proof: Securitization of migration is a well-known subject of scholarly work, but it has never been applied specifically on refugees and on the Visegrad region. It was quite easy to find numerous speech acts, which could be analyzed by the method of critical discourse analysis. However, it was a bit harder to measure public opinion in terms of forced migration. Primary data acquired by TÁRKI, Eurobarometer and other institutions proved to be a good sources of information in terms of citizens’ attitudes towards securitization. It is only partially true that speech acts resulted in the acceptance of such extraordinary measures as the border fence in Hungary and Slovakia or the restrictive acts in each four country, but there was a correlation. However, the polls showed a relative low degree of knowledge on EU and V4 matters in general.

Chapter 4 of the thesis applied securitization theory of the Copenhagen school on the case study of the Visegrad Group and it definitely had an added value to understand the deeper progress. In order to understand the long-term implications of this process, the research need to be continued in the next 5 years period.

With the first two sub-hypotheses fully and the third partially proved, I consider my main hypothesis proven which states that

the norm community of the European Union has been collapsed in term of forced migration, which was a field with high political salience. V4 Group securitized the humanitarian and refugee crisis of 2015, which resulted in the security dominated understand of migration politics in the European Union, where political position is determined by the discourse and narratives towards the phenomena and not by material facts of international migration.
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4.2.2. Online sources


Publications in the Field

4.3. Publications in Hungarian


4.4. Publications in English

