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## SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION DURING THE EU-BELARUS BORDER CRISIS (2021-2022)

### ABSTRACT

Securitisation is associated with a certain amount of visibility for migrants in public space. It is expressed in actions such as tightening rules on illegal border crossings, strengthening the number of forces and services at the borders, introducing a state of emergency, intensive use of surveillance technologies and control practices by uniformed services, attempts to push migrants out, and ultimately the erection of fences. The aim of the article is to present activities related to the crisis on the border of the EU with Belarus (2021-2022) in the context of the securitisation theory. The research hypothesis assumes that the militarisation and weaponisation of migration in public discourse are important factors deepening the securitisation of migration in the event of a crisis on the border of the European Union with Belarus. In addition to indicating the emergency measures used in the case of this crisis and its specific features, the article draws attention to the process of securitisation of migration in the European Union in the context of other crises that have affected the community in recent years and were significantly related to migration.

**Keywords:** migration crisis, securitisation, migration, European Union, Belarus

## INTRODUCTION

Migration is a complex process that involves the permanent and temporary movement of people, both within and between national states. It includes asylum seekers, economic migrants, and illegal migrants. Migration itself is a neutral phenomenon, and its nature is determined subjectively by the needs and sensitivity of the reference objects concerned.<sup>1</sup> The impact of migration flows on state security is a result of the effectiveness of migration policy. Thanks to it, decisions are made about who can be admitted to a given country, who can be expelled on the basis of specific legal provisions, and who can be granted citizenship. In this way, migration policy influences the intensity and scale of migration.<sup>2</sup> In turn, the security policy measures used by states regarding migration vary. They depend on the nature, size and strength of threats to values considered important for the security of states and the stability of the international system.<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 2021, three member states of the European Union (EU), or Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, were affected by a wave of migration, which can be described as the effect of the artificially implemented practice of increasing migration flows.<sup>4</sup> It was carried out by Belarus in order to destabilise the community and its member states. The influx of migrants resulted in a sharp increase in attempts to illegally cross the EU border with Belarus. Groups of several dozen people often decided to force their way into the Schengen area, throwing branches and stones at border guards or destroying fences.<sup>5</sup> The states affected by the crisis decided to strengthen the number of cross-border services in the areas bordering Belarus. Numerous regulations have also been introduced regarding illegal border crossings. Actions aimed at protecting the borders were accompanied by a discourse in the public space in which migrants were described as 'a weapon in the hands of Lukashenko' or a 'hybrid threat'.

The aim of the article is to present activities related to the crisis on the border of the EU with Belarus (2021-2022) in the context of securitisation theory. The research hypothesis states that the militarisation and weaponisation of migration in public discourse are important factors deepening the securitisation of migration in the event of a crisis on the border of the EU with Belarus. In addition to indicating the emergency measures used in the case of this crisis and its specific features, the article draws attention to the process of securitisation of migration in the EU in the context of other

<sup>1</sup> Wing Commander P.E. O'Neill RAF, "The European Union and Migration: Security versus Identity?," *Defence Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (2006), p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> A. Adamczyk, "Procesy migracyjne w Polsce a aktywność państwa w sferze bezpieczeństwa," *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2021), p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> R. Zięba, "Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe w pierwszej dekadzie XXI wieku w kontekście nowych wyzwań i zagrożeń," *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, no. 4 (2007), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> M. Forti, "Belarus-Sponsored Migration Movements and the Response by Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland: A Critical Appraisal," *European Papers*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2023), p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> A. Wawrzusiszyn, "Kryzys migracyjny na granicy polsko-białoruskiej i jego wpływ na bezpieczeństwo Polski," *Nowa Polityka Wschodnia*, no. 2(33) (2022), p. 52.

crises that have affected the community in recent years and were significantly related to migration. In order to conduct the analysis, the research process used a descriptive-explanatory approach and the desk research method, as well as a systematic review of international literature and websites regarding the securitisation of migration in the EU.

## SECURITISATION THEORY

The concept of securitisation was formulated by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. It aimed to broaden the approach to the security agenda with an analytical framework of securitisation, as new threats and challenges emerged.<sup>6</sup> Securitisation theory holds that security is a highly political process. In turn, issues typically become security threats through a sequence of events involving the securitising entity, the securitising speech act/move (the actor declares that the existence of a particular reference object is at risk unless urgent action is taken immediately), the recipient (the audience, which must accept the threat narrative embedded in the securitisation movement), and finally the adoption of emergency measures through which established rules are violated.<sup>7</sup> An important condition that will facilitate the transformation of recipients' perceptions of a given problem is the position of the securitising actor. The actor obtains the support of the target audience by using appropriate words and their associated frames of reference in a given context.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of securitisation theory, we are dealing with an intersubjective process of including or excluding certain issues from the security zone (a discursive approach to security<sup>9</sup>). Thus, the intersubjectivity of security depends to a large extent on a common understanding of what constitutes a threat<sup>10</sup> and not on individual or objective feelings. Securitisation is not merely a process of intersubjective communication. It can also be considered a process of intertextual communication because danger can be created, for example, through text or images. The message is understood in a specific context, and the way it is received is related to the degree of perception, which depends on the specific associations or emotional references of the recipient. The intertextuality of the message results from the network of references in which it will function. It can therefore be culturally conditioned and understood in the context of other related messages.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> T. Gyelník, "Borders, De-Borderization and Migration Narratives in Hungary," *Przegląd Strategiczny*, no. 14 (2021), p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> R. Floyd, "Securitisation and the Function of Functional Actors," *Critical Studies on Security*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2021), p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> T. Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2005), p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> Ł. Fijałkowski, "Teoria sekurytyzacji i konstruowanie bezpieczeństwa," *Przegląd Strategiczny*, no. 1 (2012), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> A. Ziętek, "Sekurytyzacja migracji w bezpieczeństwie kulturowym Europy," *TEKA of Political Science and International Relations*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2017), p. 33.

Due to the fact that politicisation and securitisation do not always take place within the state, they may occur in other forums, e.g., within non-governmental organisations or public opinion, which, for example, 'secures' the issue of migration in order to defend national identity.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in some cases, a process of desecuritisation occurs. We are then dealing with the invalidation of an issue, especially one related to politics or national affairs, that was previously considered a threat and subject to securitisation.<sup>13</sup> However, desecuritisation may pose certain problems and lead to the neglect of an issue<sup>14</sup> that poses a real danger.

## SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the growing dissatisfaction of Europeans with the influx of migrants and the ineffectiveness of the migration policy pursued by European governments changed the balance of political forces in some European countries. It led, among others, to the success of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections (the United Kingdom Independence Party – UKIP and the National Front in France<sup>15</sup>). Thus, the perception of migrants as a threat to security has influenced the securitisation of migration policy even in countries that were until recently perceived as pro-migration. In one of Amnesty International's reports from 2014, the organisation drew attention to the EU's activities, which contributed, among others, to adopting extraordinary measures whereby member states have created a 'tight fortress' to prevent migrants from reaching their borders (regardless of the reason for their arrival). The activities undertaken in this regard included, for example, financing an advanced monitoring system through support for member states such as Greece or Bulgaria, through which attempts were made to tighten the external borders. Moreover, the commencement of operations at the community level of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), responsible for coordinating the work of the border guard, was also considered a manifestation of progressive securitisation.<sup>16</sup> In public discourse, Frontex's activities carried out together with member states have been defined

<sup>12</sup> O. Perni, "Migration Flows, Societal Security and EU's Integration Process. The Spanish Case," Paper prepared for the International Conference 'Europe Security in the 21 Century,' Granada, 5-9 November 2001, at <http://www.ugr.es/~ceas/Multiculturalismo/Migration%20Flows.pdf>, 27 XII 2023, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> S. Uprety, "India-Nepal Border Dispute, Media and Securitization in Nepal: A Critical Discourse Analysis," in T. Elitaş (ed.), *Maintaining International Relations Through Digital Public Diplomacy Policies and Discourses*, Pennsylvania 2023, pp. 81-94.

<sup>14</sup> O. Perni, "Migration Flows...", p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> D. Liszkowska, "The European Parliament after the Treaty of Lisbon," *E-Journal of Law*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2018), p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International, *Ludzkie koszty budowy Twierdzy Europa: Łamanie praw człowieka na granicach zewnętrznych UE*, 2014, at [https://amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Ludzkie\\_koszty\\_budowy\\_Twierdzy\\_Europa\\_2014.pdf](https://amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Ludzkie_koszty_budowy_Twierdzy_Europa_2014.pdf), 27 XII 2023, p. 2.

as strengthening security policy and defining migration as a threat and a crime.<sup>17</sup> According to Valeria Bello, the role of this agency has become extremely important in the process of criminalising migrants and refugees. This happened, among others, due to the practice of including Syrians fleeing the war in the category of migrants illegally crossing the EU borders.<sup>18</sup>

Until 2015, the quasi-militarisation of Europe's external borders became an expression of the securitisation of migration in the EU,<sup>19</sup> which, apart from Amnesty International, also drew attention from other non-governmental organisations. It manifested itself, among others, in erecting a fence in Ceuta and Melilla or installing an early warning radar system along the Spanish coast. Moreover, in the context of the EU's southern neighbourhood, the externalisation of migration management was intended to transform North Africa into a buffer zone. One of the proposals was to create platforms for bringing migrants ashore in third countries in the southern Mediterranean region. It was based on the assumption that the southern neighbours of the EU would take over responsibility for accepting migrants in exchange for financial and technical support.<sup>20</sup> Although the EU has not recorded major successes in this respect, the development of close cooperation with third countries in the area of migration regulations has undoubtedly become one of the priorities in the community's migration policy<sup>21</sup> in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the following years, the process of militarisation of EU policy towards migrants was accompanied by certain programmes referred to as 'militarised,' including the expanding mandate of Frontex as well as Operation Sophia, established in June 2015 as part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (Sophia was transformed in 2020 into Operation IRINI, or EU Navfor Med Irini). The aim of the operation was to intercept and detain human traffickers and smugglers of migrants at sea.<sup>22</sup> The process

<sup>17</sup> A. Ruiz Benedicto, P. Brunet, *Building Walls: Fear and Securitization in the European Union*, Barcelona 2018, at [https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/building\\_walls\\_-\\_full\\_report\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/building_walls_-_full_report_-_english.pdf), 27 XII.2023, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> V. Bello, "The Spiralling of the Securitisation of Migration in the EU: From the Management of a 'Crisis' to a Governance of Human Mobility?," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 48, no. 6 (2020), p. 1340.

<sup>19</sup> J.C. Völkel, "Money for Nothing, the Cricks for Free," *Comparative Migration Studies*, vol. 2 (2014), p. 156.

<sup>20</sup> T. Abderrahim, "The Securitisation of the EU's Migration Policies: What Consequences for Southern Mediterranean Countries and their Relations with the EU?," *EuroMed Survey 2018: Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses*, at <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-securitisation-of-the-eus-migration-policies-what-consequences-for-southern-mediterranean-countries-and-their-relations-with-the-eu/>, 27 XII 2023, pp. 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> D. Caballero Vélez, E. Krapivnitskaya, "The EU Migration Policy Securitization Process: From a Domestic to a Foreign Dimension," *Studia z Polityki Publicznej*, vol. 7, no. 4(28) (2020), p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> L.S. Talani, "Securitisation of Migration after the Refugee Crisis: Increasing Insecurity for Everyone?," *Routed Magazine*, 29 May 2020, at <https://www.routedmagazine.com/omc2020-4-securitisation>, 27 XII 2023.

of militarisation was also gradually strengthened by securitised language, used, among others, by the media and some European politicians.<sup>23</sup>

## MIGRATION CRISIS IN THE EU IN 2015-2016

In 2015, during the largest migration crisis since World War II in Europe, over a million migrants and asylum seekers reached Greece and Italy, from where there were secondary flows to other EU member states. It has been estimated that over a million asylum applications and such a significant increase in the number of migrants and refugees at the EU's borders could lead to the collapse of the Schengen area and the common asylum system.<sup>24</sup> Registration systems could not keep up and cope with such a huge influx of migrants, which called into question the existing system and border control.

The migration crisis revealed significant differences in interests between members of the EU. In the face of increased migration pressure, the weakness of the EU institutions became visible, as they were unable to develop an action plan acceptable to all countries.<sup>25</sup> During the crisis, member states did not agree on how to face the migration and humanitarian challenges they faced. On the one hand, Germany adopted the open door policy and agreed to the relocation mechanism. On the other hand, the Visegrád Group countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic) opposed to accepting refugees on their territories.<sup>26</sup> Many member states also decided to take unilateral measures, such as restoring border control (Slovakia, Austria, and Germany), returning migrants seeking asylum to other European countries, building a fence on the border (between Hungary, Serbia and Croatia), and ultimately even closing it (the border between Hungary and Croatia<sup>27</sup>). It was an increasingly common practice for border guard officers to push refugees out of the territories of individual member states.

In the face of increased migration pressure, the European Union recognised the situation in the region as extraordinary<sup>28</sup> and decided to break the existing legal procedures, thanks to the (mentioned earlier) extraordinary mechanism of relocating migrants mainly from Italy and Greece and sending them to other member states.<sup>29</sup> The

<sup>23</sup> A. Bala Akal, "European Union-Belarus Border Crisis: Why the Narrative of 'Hybrid Warfare' is Dangerous," 18 November 2021, at <https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2021/11/18/european-union-belarus-border-crisis-why-the-narrative-of-hybrid-warfare-is-dangerous/>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>24</sup> T. Abderrahim, "The Securitisation...", p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> E. Chwiej, "Wpływ „kryzysu migracyjnego” na bezpieczeństwo Polski i Niemiec," *Studia Interkulturowe Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 13 (2020), p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> D. Caballero Vélez, E. Krapivnitskaya, „The EU Migration...", p. 107.

<sup>27</sup> A. Bałamut, "Polska wobec kryzysu imigracyjnego w Unii Europejskiej," in B. Moło (ed.), *Migracja i uchodźstwo wyzwaniem dla bezpieczeństwa i współpracy międzynarodowej w XXI wieku*, Kraków 2018, p. 107.

<sup>28</sup> Z. Czachór, "The EU External Policy and the 2015-2018 Refugee Relocation System in the Light of Historical Institutionalism," *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej*, vol. 15 (2021), p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Komisja Europejska, *Wniosek ROZPORZĄDZENIE PARLAMENTU EUROPEJSKIEGO I RADY ustanawiające kryzysowy mechanizm relokacji i zmieniające rozporządzenie Parlamentu Europejskiego*



new rules, which referred to the mechanism as being based on the values and solidarity of the EU's members,<sup>30</sup> sparked huge opposition from some countries, including in connection with a decision taken by a qualified majority of votes. Moreover, the document in this case, which has been amended many times, has been assessed more as the political position of individual countries than as applicable law.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the issue of migration has become the basis for tensions between the national interests of member states and supranational interests. The question has arisen whether member states are actually able to manage borders and control migration.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CRISIS ON THE EU BORDER WITH BELARUS (2021-2022) AND EMERGENCY MEASURES APPLIED

In response to the sanctions imposed by the European Union against Belarus, another migration crisis occurred in the Schengen area in the summer of 2021. In July 2021, Aleksandr Lukashenko announced that the Belarusian authorities would not stop illegal migrants from trying to enter the territory of the EU. The case of this crisis showed that the instrumentalisation of migration gives a state the ability to direct migration movements with the intention of destabilising the target state, influencing its actions and trying to obtain concessions in a specific sphere.<sup>32</sup> This crisis was described as an implementation of 'Operation Lock' and an element of a hybrid operation of the Belarusian special services with the unofficial participation of the Russian services.<sup>33</sup> The action was prepared, among others, in cooperation with tourist offices, consular agencies, airlines and companies financing the opening of new charter connections with Belarus in Middle Eastern countries.<sup>34</sup>

Member states did not agree to accept migrants staying in the territory of Belarus,<sup>35</sup> and, in the context of activities described as threats to national security, they began to

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*i Rady (UE) nr 604/2013 z dnia 26 czerwca 2013 r. w sprawie ustanowienia kryteriów i mechanizmów ustalania państwa członkowskiego odpowiedzialnego za rozpatrzenie wniosku o udzielenie ochrony międzynarodowej złożonego w jednym z państw członkowskich przez obywatela państwa trzeciego lub bezpaństwowca, COM/2015/0450 final, 2015/0208(COD).*

<sup>30</sup> S. Musiał, "Państwa członkowskie wobec kryzysu migracyjnego w Europie," *Colloquium*, no. 1 (2019), p. 129.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> M. Forti, "Belarus-Sponsored...", p. 229.

<sup>33</sup> B. Fraszka, "Sytuacja na granicy polsko-białoruskiej: przyczyny, aspekt geopolityczny, narracje," *Warsaw Institute*, 23 December 2021, at <https://warsawinstitute.org/pl/sytuacja-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej-przyczyny-aspekt-geopolityczny-narracje/>, 27 XII 2023, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> "W Brukseli odbyło się zamknięte spotkanie dotyczące sytuacji na granicy polsko-białoruskiej," *Forsal.pl*, 9 November 2021, at <https://forsal.pl/swiat/unia-europejska/artykuly/8289044,w-brukseli-spotkanie-dotyczace-sytuacji-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej.html>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>35</sup> T. Wicha, "The Imposition of the State of Emergency on the Part of Poland in 2021 Due to the Border Migration Crisis with Belarus," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska*, vol. 6, no. 6 (2021), p. 87.

opt to seal the borders.<sup>36</sup> The situation described as an attempt to destabilise the Community led, among other things, to the introduction of a state of emergency and the deployment of troops on the border with Belarus. In addition, Lithuania and Latvia requested assistance from Frontex.<sup>37</sup> As a result of the 'extraordinary' and 'exceptional' situation, the European Commission (EC) has allowed three crisis-affected member states to extend the period for registering asylum applications to 4 weeks (instead of 3 to 10 days) and to use the asylum procedure at the border to examine all asylum applications, including appeals, within a maximum period of 16 weeks (but excluding cases that did not allow adequate support to be provided to applicants with particular health problems<sup>38</sup>).

Migratory pressure, coordinated by the Belarusian authorities, also became a factor that contributed to the construction of barriers on the external borders of the Baltic countries and Poland. It should be noted, however, that due to the need to counteract illegal migration and smuggling, as well as possible provocations from Belarus and Russia, plans to build barriers and install sensors and cameras on the borders of the Baltic States with Belarus and Russia appeared already in 2014. However, at that time, apart from Lithuania's plans, most of them were suspended or abandoned at a very early stage.<sup>39</sup> Within a year and a half after the outbreak of the crisis, 529 kilometres of four-meter fences and 356 kilometres of parallel razor wire were erected on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border. In the spring of 2023, the installation of electronic monitoring systems was completed in an approximately 100-kilometer-long section along watercourses where no fence was built.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the Polish-Belarusian border, in the summer of 2022, the construction of a fence made of steel spans and razor wire with a height of 5.5 m and an electronic barrier (a system of cameras and motion sensors) was completed on a 186 kilometre section.<sup>41</sup> In the following months, Polish border guards pointed out in one of their interviews that the border fence did not provide full security, and it turned out to be necessary to spread additional coils of razor wire. Its

<sup>36</sup> M. Potocki, M. Cedro, "Europa już nie taka gościnna. Polska granica po raz pierwszy znajduje się pod tak dużą presją," *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 23 August 2021, at <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8229866,uchodzczy-granica-polsko-bialoruska-europa-imigranci.html>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>37</sup> S. Nowacka, "Migracje z państw arabskich w świetle sytuacji na granicy UE z Białorusią," *Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych*, 18 November 2021, at <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/migracje-z-panstw-arabskich-w-swietle-sytuacji-na-granicy-ue-z-bialorusia>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>38</sup> "Asylum and Return: Commission Proposes Temporary Legal and Practical Measures to Address the Emergency Situation at the EU's External Border with Belarus," *European Commission*, 1 December 2021, at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_6447](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6447), 27 XII 2023.

<sup>39</sup> B. Chmielewski, J. Tarociński, "Bariery różnych prędkości: państwa bałtyckie i Finlandia odgradzają się od Rosji i Białorusi," *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich*, 15 September 2023, at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/komentarze-osw/2023-09-15/bariery-roznych-predkosci-panstwa-baltyckie-i-finlandia>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> A. Ziemska, "Granica polsko-białoruska. Budowa zapory elektronicznej dobiega końca," *Polska Agencja Prasowa*, 1 May 2023, at <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1567371%2Cgranica-polsko-bialoruska-budowa-zapory-elektronicznej-dobiega-konca.html>, 27 XII 2023.



task was to strengthen the protection of Poland's border and thus the external borders of the European Union, Schengen and NATO. In the case of Latvia, the construction of the fence takes the longest, and the infrastructure on the 149.7 kilometre-long section was contracted at the end of June 2024.<sup>42</sup>

In the wake of the crisis at the Schengen border with Belarus, the definition of a threat and an *attack on the integrity and security of the EU* through instrumental migration was extensively discussed in the formal justification of the draft regulation on instrumentalisation.<sup>43</sup> This concept is defined in the proposal for amendments to the Schengen Borders Code as a *situation where a third country instigates irregular migratory flows into the Union by actively encouraging or facilitating the movement of third-country nationals to the external borders, onto or from within its territory and then onwards to those external borders, where such actions are indicative of an intention of a third country to destabilise the Union or a Member State, where the nature of such actions is liable to put at risk essential State functions, including its territorial integrity, the maintenance of law and order or the safeguard of its national security*. Under the amendment, a member state that finds itself in an emergency and extraordinary situation due to the instrumentalisation of migrants will have the opportunity to restrict flows at the border. Moreover, in order to protect national security and prevent unauthorised entry, a member state will be able to limit the number of open border crossings and extend the deadline for registering applications for international protection.<sup>44</sup>

## MILITARISATION AND WEAPONISATION OF MIGRATION IN THE DISCOURSE ON THE CRISIS ON THE BORDER WITH BELARUS

Ayşe Bala Akal describes the discourse surrounding the crisis on the border with Belarus as unique because its characteristic feature was *overtly militarising language*, through which migrants were referred to as 'military tools', 'Lukashenko's weapon',<sup>45</sup> or 'demographic weapons'<sup>46</sup> in 'the hybrid war' against the EU.<sup>47</sup> This rhetoric was used by most

<sup>42</sup> "Permanent Fence Construction on Latvia-Belarus Border Begins," *Eng.LSM.lv*, 30 August 2022, at <https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/defense/permanent-fence-construction-on-latvia-belarus-border-begins.a471536/>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>43</sup> M. Grześkowiak, "The 'Guardian of the Treaties' is No More? The European Commission and the 2021: Humanitarian Crisis on Poland-Belarus Border," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2023), p. 94.

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, *Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL addressing situations of instrumentalisation in the field of migration and asylum*, COM(2021) 890 final, 2021/0427(COD).

<sup>45</sup> K. Pruszkiewicz, "Łukaszenka wypowiedział Europie wojnę hybrydową, w której bronią są migranci," *Newsweek*, 28 September 2021, at <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/wojna-hybrydowa-w-ktorej-bronia-aleksandra-lukaszenki-sa-migranci-sprawdzamy-jak/jey9qsm>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Z. Śliwa, A. Olech, "Migracje i kryzys na granicy polsko-białoruskiej," *Instytut Nowej Europy*, 1 March 2022, at <https://ine.org.pl/migracje-i-kryzys-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej/>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>47</sup> A. Bala Akal, "European Union-Belarus..."

of the press, the EC, and many politicians from European Union member states to describe the situation at the border.<sup>48</sup> During the parliamentary debate on the situation on the border with Belarus, Vice President of the EC Margaritis Schinas stated that *what is happening on the [...] eastern border [of the EU] is not [...] a migration crisis but a hybrid threat, particularly cruel and shameful, as well as the state-sponsored instrumentalisation of thousands of emigrants*.<sup>49</sup> In turn, European People's Party Group (EPP-Group) MP Ewa Kopacz stated that *deceived and wronged people looking for a better life in Europe [...] are used as weapons [in] acts of state terrorism carried out by the Belarusian regime*.<sup>50</sup> Felix Bender points out that using such language about migration changes the perspective of people seeking refuge in Europe. They are no longer individuals seeking international protection against political persecution in their countries but constitute a threat in themselves that requires,<sup>51</sup> among other things, sending troops to the borders.<sup>52</sup> Defining migration in the context of a war analogy used by the media and EU politicians has led to a *distorted portrayal of a non-traditional security issue as a military threat*.<sup>53</sup> In turn, calling a specific object a 'weapon' actually led to a situation in which people reacted to this object as if it were a weapon, even when in fact it is harmless.<sup>54</sup>

The weaponisation of migration in the case of the crisis on the EU-Belarusian border occurred when it was defined as a hybrid threat aimed at destabilising the eastern border of the EU and NATO.<sup>55</sup> The concept of weaponisation of migration was introduced to the literature on the subject by Kelly Greenhill. The researcher pointed out that the instrumentalisation of migrants has a long history and concerns both periods of war and peace.<sup>56</sup> This process primarily concerns the manipulation of population movements, which constitute an operational and strategic means for both political and military purposes. Examples of using migrants as weapons include terrorism and the use of migration flows and refugee status to carry out terrorist attacks.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>48</sup> F. Bender, "Against 'Weaponised Migration,'" *Social Europe*, 10 November 2021, at <https://www.socialeurope.eu/against-weaponised-migration>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>49</sup> "Debata w Parlamencie Europejskim o sytuacji na granicy z Białorusią," *EuroPAP News*, 16 December 2021, at <https://europapnews.pap.pl/debata-w-parlamencie-europejskim-o-sytuacji-na-granicy-z-bialorusia>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> F. Bender, "Against..."

<sup>52</sup> "Jednostki Wojskowe wzmacniają 16DZ na granicy polsko-białoruskiej," *Wojsko Polskie*, 20 October 2021, at <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/9bkpanc/articles/aktualnosci-w/jednostki-wojskowe-wzmacniaja-16dz-na-granicy-polsko-bialoruskiej/>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>53</sup> A. Bala Akal, "European Union-Belarus..."

<sup>54</sup> F. Bender, "Against..."

<sup>55</sup> Ç. Toci, "The Belarus Crisis: The Weaponisation of Migration," *Beyond the Horizon*, 9 November 2021, at <https://behorizon.org/the-belarus-crisis-the-weaponisation-of-migration/>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>56</sup> K.M. Greenhill, "Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War," *Civil Wars*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2008), pp. 6-21.

<sup>57</sup> S. Başer, "The Most Insidious Weapon of the Changing World: Migration," *Bilge Strateji*, vol. 13, no. 24 (2022), pp. 169-170.

Already in 2015, citizens of the Middle East and North Africa states, trying to get by sea mainly to Western European countries, found themselves at the centre of the EU's approach to migration and, in the perception of some Europeans, began to be perceived in the context of illegal migration as a threat to national security. According to Jef Huysmans, the political process of linking migration with criminal and terrorist abuses within the EU does not take place in isolation and is related to broader politicisation. Within it, migrants and asylum seekers are presented as challenges, among others, for the protection of national identity or social regulations.<sup>58</sup> However, the evolving internal context of the EU has resulted in an increasing number of measures and policies aimed at stopping migration flows. In 2021, it was directly strengthened to include elements related to military operations,<sup>59</sup> such as the use of uniformed units to physically remove refugees from the territories of member states.

## SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, contributed to mass migration from the territory of Ukraine to EU countries. According to the information provided by the Polish Border Guard, only in the first four days after the outbreak of the war were almost 281,000 people<sup>60</sup> checked at Polish-Ukrainian border crossings. In turn, according to data from March 1, 2022, since the outbreak of the conflict, over 650,000 displaced persons<sup>61</sup> have arrived at the territory of the EU from Ukraine via Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Fearing the consequences, including the likelihood of experiencing high migratory pressure on the eastern borders of the EU, the Community has taken numerous actions in this regard. Pursuant to Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of March 4, 2022, stating the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine,<sup>62</sup> temporary protection was introduced to cover migrants from the territory of Ukraine. Thanks to it, it was possible for people migrating from war-torn territories to obtain immediate and temporary shelter in member states.<sup>63</sup>

As Elspeth Guild and Kees Groenendijk note, the argument that has appeared in recent years that the EU or some of its member states are overcrowded with the inflow

<sup>58</sup> J. Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 38, no. 5 (2022), p. 751.

<sup>59</sup> A. Halemba, "Ethnographic Snapshot: Europe in the Woods: Reflections on the Situation at the Polish-Belarusian Border," *Ethnologia Europaea*, vol. 52, no. 1 (2022), pp. 1-13.

<sup>60</sup> E. Szczepańska, "Pomagamy uchodźcom z Ukrainy," *Straż Graniczna*, 28 February 2022, at <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/9878,Pomagamy-uchodzcom-z-Ukrainy.html>, 27 XII 2023.

<sup>61</sup> *Decyzja wykonawcza Rady (UE) 2022/382 z dnia 4 marca 2022 r. stwierdzająca istnienie masowego napływu wysiedleńców z Ukrainy w rozumieniu art. 5 dyrektywy 2001/55/WE i skutkująca wprowadzeniem tymczasowej ochrony*, ST/6846/2022/INIT.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

of migrants can be considered groundless in the context of the war in Ukraine.<sup>64</sup> The admission of several million people from the territory of this country fleeing the war and open access to the territory of the community confirmed that the EU has sufficient resources to accept as many people as requested. It means that the securitisation itself depends on the context, the specifics of the audience, and the position of the securitisation entity.<sup>65</sup> As the example of migration from Ukraine shows, securitisation in the EU is related to knowledge of a given nation and the ethnic origin of migrants. In this case, we are dealing with the non-linearity of migration securitisation, which is assumed by the spiral theory of this phenomenon.<sup>66</sup> The sources of these approaches lie in alternative ways of perceiving a given nation or culture and in alternative ways of knowing them. Thus, it explains, among other things, the strengthening of the solidarity attitude of Europeans towards migrants from Ukraine, who began to cross the Schengen area en masse after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the negative attitude towards migrants from the Middle East and North Africa staying on the EU-Belarusian border, perceived as a threat to state security and national identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to representatives of the Copenhagen School, migration is constructed by political elites as a threat to security. Securitisation refers to a 'speech act' that defines a given problem as an existential threat, requiring the use of emergency measures and justifying state action that goes beyond normal political procedures. Migration therefore becomes a security issue not necessarily because of its nature or having threatening features, but only because of the way it is presented.

Through an appropriate narrative, political actors and the media shape discourses about specific groups of migrants who are defined as a threat to a given object (e.g., state security, socio-cultural identity or territorial integrity). Shaping the discourse of fear and defining the threats related to migration in relation to scenarios of chaos and disorder give governments the opportunity to control the actions and manage the attitudes of citizens towards migrants. When an intersubjective, social construction of migration as a security problem appears, and it is accepted that a given object has dangerous features, appropriate policies and practices towards migrants are introduced.

In the case of the crisis on the EU-Belarus border, the narrative about the threat posed by migrants was reinforced by the use of war rhetoric. People trying to get from the territory of Belarus to the European Union were described as 'weapons', and in order to secure the borders against them, the army was sent to help. This process can

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<sup>64</sup> E. Guild, K. Groenendijk, "The Impact of War in Ukraine on EU Migration," *Front. Hum. Dyn.*, vol. 5 (2023), pp. 1-17.

<sup>65</sup> A.W. Ziętek, "Sekurytyzacja migracji..." p. 33.

<sup>66</sup> V. Bello, "The Spiralling..." p. 1333.

be described as 'militarisation' or 'weaponisation of migration'. In such a defined context, political actors have the opportunity to apply more measures and policies aimed at stopping migration flows with acceptance from society.

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