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Western Balkan security and the European Union: taming securitization on the fringe of Europe

Djordje N. Tomic

Abstract

The paper investigates the patterns of securitization within and from the perspective of the Western Balkan countries, in the light of the external influences on the regional security. The ongoing migrant/refugee crisis, particularly at its peak during 2015 and 2016, is analyzed as an indicative case of the multilevel context for the dominant political discourse in the region. The countries most directly involved in the 'Balkan route' provided responses that differed in the extent of (de)securitization. The governments were exposed to incentives and pressures from different levels. Within this analytical framework, the argument proceeds in three stages. First, security studies and the securitization theory are assessed in the light of their embeddedness in the Western context and applicability in different political and social environments. Second, the attempt is made to classify the specificities of the Western Balkan region with reference to the concept of securitization – cultural, (geo)political and economic context, as well as the underlying socio-political processes that carry the transformation of the region's societies. The third part brings the overview of the context in which the migrant/refugee crisis has reached its peak, in 2015 and 2016. The crisis' uniqueness and historically unprecedented nature pushed the challenge beyond the traditionally expected regional threats, such as the inter-ethnic conflict, power projections, or imminent economic crises. This, in turn, opened new possibilities for the external impact. Accordingly, the key argument is that the Western Balkan governments' discourse and the approach to security were convergent with the stances taken by the EU, which eventually provided crucial incentives for political cooperation. The article concludes by proposing four sets of research caveats for the securitization studies in the Western Balkans – pertaining respectively to the region's socio-political, geopolitical and the international-political characteristics.

Introduction

Security studies started off as a product of Western – mostly American – strategic thought during the Cold War. This statement is either implied or made explicit in the historical accounts of the field and the concept of security itself (Nye and Lynn-Jones 1988: 8; Williams 2008: 2; Buzan and Hansen 2009: 8; Acharya 1997: 300-3). For Nye and Lynn-Jones, "[t]he impetus for the development of international security studies came from the twin revolutions in American foreign policy and military technology caused by the emergence of the cold war and the development of atomic weapons" (1988: 8). Describing a dominant view of the discipline as a "largely Anglo-American invention that came to prominence after the Second World War", Paul Williams underscores the role of the Western governments in the early development of the 'national security' and 'strategic' studies in the 1950s and 1960s. Not only has the discipline emerged in the American and Western European context, but it was actually a resonance of these governments' interest in performing their security role in an unprecedentedly complex and dangerous world (Williams 2008: 3; Acharya 1997: 299). The context of the complex threats to the Western, U.S.-led order after the Second World War therefore provided more than enough incentives for a more comprehensive consideration of security as an autonomous field within social sciences. Robert Cox characterizes this order as *Pax Americana*: a hegemony of the U.S. within the Western hemisphere based on the American economic-productive dominance that culminated during WWII (Cox 1987: 212-13).

Both during the Cold War and in more recent times, non-Western countries have regarded International Relations (IR) as an "imported discipline". Even societies with highly developed authentic intellectual traditions (such as China, India, and some Arab countries) have channeled their specific worldviews in other fields, leaving IR under the decisive influence of Western theories (Wæver 2004: 23).

> "[W]e are faced with a striking misfit between IR theory and third world reality. The discipline's focus on sovereignty, inter-state war and abstract theory is confronted by a reality of multiple over-lapping political and social systems, conflicts that are primarily internal or transnational and a need to integrate everyday life and IR knowledge. The traditional concept of security is obviously questioned in this process too." (Wæver 2004: 24)

Securitization is among the concepts born within the Western world. It designates a process through which a certain issue is presented and treated as an existential threat that requires emergency measures outside the usual political procedures (Buzan et al. 1998: 23/4). Ole Wæver is credited for the forging of the term 'securitization' (Booth 2007: 166).

The theory was initially rooted in the liberal-democratic context. Applying it to other political environments requires what Sartori called "conceptual traveling" - inclusion of additional elements that stem from new cases, without losing the essence of the initial theory and allowing "conceptual stretching" (Vuori 2008: 73).

Due to the conflicts and political crises that took place immediately after the end of the Cold War, the ex-Yugoslav space has represented a relevant object for the security analyses. However, while a host of studies have dealt with different aspects of these challenges, the application of the securitization theory remains mostly absent, especially from the domestic perspective.

This article therefore seeks to determine whether the stretching of the securitization theory to the region of Western Balkans would be a reasonable enterprise. The motivation to look for those answers comes from the glaring gap in the research on the Balkan security: the concept of securitization appears to be seldom analyzed from the perspective of the domestic actors, whereas the actual practice of securitization is present and relevant for the regional dynamics. The key question is which particular characteristics possibly call for adaptation before the theory may be appropriately applied to the region. The paper proceeds in three sections before offering conclusions. First, a brief overview of the development of security studies since the Second World War will define the general theoretical framework for the argument that follows. This part will also present the main features – theoretical assumptions, research challenges, and central ideas – of securitization theory, with an emphasis on its application to the problem of international migration. By defining this framework, we are especially interested in the issue of cultural and political embeddedness of the discipline and its theories. In particular, the question is to what extent securitization theory is meaningfully transferable outside the Western social and political context.

The second section is dedicated to the characteristics of the Western Balkan region with regard to security concerns and the main tenets of securitization theory. This region encompasses the ex-Yugoslav countries, excluding Slovenia, but including Albania. The name 'Western Balkans' was coined by the EU institutions as part of the post-conflict mediation in the late 1990s (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 379). As Buzan and Weaver note, the term emerged in the 'EU parlance' since the mid-1990s in order to encompass the countries involved in the post-Yugoslav and Kosovo crisis. The region's very designation has therefore had a security-related bearing. Given the directions of the migration flows at hand, attention will be placed on three countries and their respective governments: The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (henceforth: "Macedonia"), Serbia and Croatia.

The third part offers the overview of the main context in which the three states were dealing with the so-called "migration crisis" at its peak in 2015 and 2016. According to the Frontex data: in 2015, more than 764,000 illegal individual crossings were detected in the region – 16 times as many as in 2014 (around 43,000) and six times as many as in 2016 (over 122,000).[1] The purpose of the established timeline is to map the environment in which the three governments were making their decisions. Thus drawn, the context points to the multilevel logic of securitization, with a strong role played by external, European actors.

Reconstructing these conditions lays the groundwork for the conclusions regarding the adaptations of securitization theory to this particular case. Without claiming full universality, I offer some more general implications for the theory's "conceptual traveling".

Security studies and securitization theory: Western embeddedness and beyond

Two major characteristics have contributed to the initial identification and positioning of the discipline: the inseparability of security from its object and the embeddedness of security studies in the U.S.-led Western world. Both of these elements have shaped the debates in the field, profoundly affecting its ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions in recent decades.

The first fundamental idea, that security is inconceivable without being applied to some object, is both obvious and unavoidable in order to understand much of the debate among scholars of security

[1] http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-balkan-route/.

studies. Even if a concrete referential object is not specifically identified, its existence is at least an implicit part of any meaningful consideration about security. In other words, "[w]ithout a referent object there can be no threats and no discussion of security because the concept is meaningless without something to secure" (Williams P. 2008: 7).

As argued here, the question "whose security", directly affects the dynamics of addressing security issues. The initial, foundational works of the discipline were predominantly concerned with "national security". However, this fluid term is subject to various interpretations and practical implications, depending on the perspective of those using it (Wolfers 1952; Acharya 1997: 300). Since the discipline was born in a "state-centric" and "war-centric" universe (Acharya 1997: 301), in the spirit of the prevailing classical realist thought, the nation-state initially represented the dominant referent object. This was based "upon the unconditional legitimacy of the state, a societal consensus over basic values and the near-elimination of violence from political life, which permitted a strong identification of the security of the state with the security of its citizens" (Krause 2007: 203).

Kolodziej identifies two main reasons for the initial state-centric focus: the historical importance of the nation-state as the "principal unit of political organization" and its monopoly on legitimate violence (2005: 26). The latter point echoes Max Weber's notion of the legitimacy of violence reserved to the state. According to Kolodziej, the state may be limited in the exercise of coercion across the world, but the Weberian notion of legitimate violence as the state's prerogative is "widely accepted, implicitly or explicitly, by most members of the states of the world" (Ibid.: 56). In the first decades of its development, security studies gradually shifted its focus away from domestic issues and towards external threats, giving impetus to the growth of international security studies (Buzan and Hansen 2009: 11). Similarly, the rise of the neorealist IR focus on structure and macro-level analysis favored existing *strategy studies*, which had been mainly developed in UK academia during at least the two decades prior to Kenneth Waltz's landmark 1979 neorealist piece "Theory of International Relations" (Smith 1999: 74). As a product of the state-centric realist thought, strategy studies focused mainly on "military relations between states", with nuclear issues at the center of interest (Ibid.: 72).

During the final decade of the Cold War, new scholarship tried to address the issue of security from a standpoint other than the West. Caroline Thomas issued a critique of "Western security experts" for having applied concepts and analytical tools originating in the "First World" to the issues of the Third World "in a wholly inappropriate fashion" (Thomas 1989: 174). The studies of "Third World security" emphasized the following elements: different conditions of social and political life; the higher level of internal, in particular economic threats; and the problematic role of the state in non-Western societies (Smith 1999: 81/2). According to Mohammed Ayoob, the conception of the state and its relation to security, essentially differentiate Third World perspectives from Western ones.[2] As Vijay Prashad notes, the Third World represents a result of a post-WWII political movement, that encompassed anti-colonial liberation struggle of nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Prashad 2007: xv-xix).

The end of the Cold War has shaken the grounds of security studies. The apparent inability of the discipline to explain the accelerated but mainly peaceful demise of the Soviet Union, inspired a wave of critical new contributions. Even before the actual collapse of the Berlin Wall, the most

[2]Ayoob justifies the use of the 'Third World' label as a generic term for all the countries that share the "unequal encounter" with European ones and often also have colonial experience in common (Ayoob, 1984: 43). The issue of different denominations of the countries outside the political West (Third World, periphery, the South…) is not at the core of this paper's topic and we will use some of those terms interchangeably.

important challenges were identified as the insufficiency of deterrence theory, the lack of theoretical innovation and the neglect of history, and – most importantly for our argument here – the "pitfalls of ethnocentrism due to American dominance of the field" (Nye and Lynn-Jones 1988: 10/11).

At the same time, the Third World itself provided a compelling case for the broadening and widening of the discipline. The complex security challenges in this group of countries demanded that scholars move beyond the state as a unit of analysis, include nonmilitary issues in the security concerns, and seek solutions for international security outside of the balance of power framework (Acharya 1997: 301-3).

Securitization – from a European theory to broader applications

The emerging critical perspectives on security are often represented by the triangle of European cities which served as the cradle the following innovative schools of thought: Aberystwyth (widening, emancipation, and social construction of threats), Copenhagen (sectoral approach, regional perspective, and securitization) and Paris (roles of agents and agencies empowered by their social positioning – following Bourdieu's sociology) (Wæver 2004). Two contending worldviews were located within the Western political realm, with 'European' scholars being more inclined to sociological and historicist approaches, and 'American' ones tending to use more empirical, quantitative and strategy-based analytical tools.

As part of the Copenhagen school of security studies, securitization theory states that security is constructed as a domain of action through communicative acts done by significant actors within a political system, and is especially effective at the nation-state level (Waever 2007: 69/70; Waever 2004: 7; Williams 2003: 511/12). Ayoob's statement about the Third World *regimes*' venue-shopping manipulations in the Third World can be considered as a precursor of the securitization theory:

> By *turning a political* (and quite often a social and economic) *problem into a military one*, and by presenting the military threat as coming from external sources, regimes in the Third World quite often try to *choose an arena of confrontation* with domestic dissidents that is favourable to themselves, namely, the military arena. (Ayoob 1984: 44; emphasis added)[3]

The broadened Copenhagen school agenda raised the question of distinguishing security from non-security issues in very disparate situations. Securitization is, in fact, a response to this concern: five sectors provide an overwhelming array of issues with a potential to become security problems, but the latter are only those which are designated by speech act as threats to survival (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2010: 76). Speech act, the central instrument for securitization, represents a performative communicative action – sending a message that itself produces effect on the audience (Balzacq et al. 2016: 495).[4]

Securitization, attributing the quality of a security challenge to a certain issue, can be regarded as a "more extreme version of politicization" - the issue is "presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures, and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure" (Buzan

[3] It is worth noting that Ayoob uses the term *regime* which seems to reflect a 'Western' normative stance towards Third World governments. Ayoob's further elaboration of this point shows that his criticism is based on the analytical criteria for democracy that are also a 'Western' theoretical creation.
[4] For a more thorough elaboration of the concept of speech act see: John R. Searle et al. (1980) *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, Dordrecht, New York, London: D. Reidel Publishing Company; Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell (2006) *Propaganda and Persuasion*, London: Sage.

et al. 1998: 23/4).Even though the "Copenhagen" authors specify that the concept of securitization is primarily developed for the framework of liberal democracies, they explicitly claim the concept's applicability to other political environments as well:

> ...[I]n other societies there will also be "rules", as there are for any society, and when a securitizing actor uses a rhetoric of existential threat and thereby takes an issue out of what *under those conditions* is "normal politics", we have a case of securitization. (Buzan et al. 1998: 25/6; emphasis added)

According to the theory's key tenets, speech act analysis acknowledges three distinct elements as the objects of inquiry: referent objects whose protection is required; securitizing actors who call for protection from an existential threat; and functional actors who influence the security dynamics in a given setting, but do not themselves engage in securitizing discourse (Ibid: 36).

Since the initial formulation of securitization theory in the 1990s, critics addressed what they identified as the theory's soft spots, namely: an excessive focus on the speech act, while neglecting securitization practices beyond the linguistic aspect; a narrow definition of the context; and restricted perspective of the process itself (Huysmans 2011: 373; Balzacq et al., 2016: 498; McDonald 2008; Bourbeau 2011: 125/6; Booth 2007: 164/5; Bigo 2000: 198).

We can argue here that all three essential units of analysis are necessarily context-dependent, and that the main rules and values of any society will shape the contents of these three categories. Since securitizing is a step outside the normal borders of politics, the initial task for researchers is to delineate what in fact constitutes the usual way in which political processes are developing in a particular society. Therefore, trying to adopt a single, universal understanding of what *normal politics* is, can prevent from understanding what that category, as well as security itself, actually means to the people in question. Additionally, leaving the realm of the usual politics does not necessarily constitute an illegal act. As Neocleous notes, introducing emergencies and resorting to violence is often actually being "legitimated *through* law on the grounds of necessity and in the name of security" (Neocleous 2008: 71).

In less democratic political systems there is in fact a particularly strong case for the application of securitization theory. Indeed, referring frequently to reasons of security in order to justify and support the concentration of power, is one of the trademarks of undemocratic states. Understanding this process through the lenses of securitization is therefore a reasonable research endeavor (Wæver 2004: 24).

The dominant scholarship dealing with securitization seldom departs from its liberal-democratic, Western context. Examples of empirical analyses of the developed democracies (though not exclusively European) are abundant: Australia, Canada, France, (to a lesser extent) Germany, the UK and the US. This is even more evident in the case of securitizing migrations, given the attraction of these countries for the migrants.

Assuming this bias to be necessary, Claire Wilkinson (2007) goes as far as to warn that the application of the original version of securitization theory "outside the West" cannot yield valid results. Based on the case of Kyrgyzstan, Wilkinson proposes to change the theory sufficiently by questioning the theory's normative assumptions, taking into account the complexity of relations and

mutual constitution of the actors and their referential objects, and conceptualizing universally the relation between speech act and action, applicable to different political contexts (Wilkinson 2007: 22). However, these recommendations only highlight very general ideas regarding possible improvements.

Noting that the main theorists of securitization have only had a general idea that securitization is applicable across the globe, without any precision as to the necessary conceptual adaptation, Juha Vuori has sought to apply the theory to non-democratic environments, such as China (2008: 66). Since violent struggle for power and antagonism can often be considered normal in societies that lack democratic capacity, moving issues to the security field does not occur through deviation from democratic procedures, but through the designation of threats to core values (Ibid: 69). Another example of the same argument is Maja Ružić's analysis of the Cuban government's securitization during the 1962 Missile Crisis. Nevertheless, the author's rather ambitious general conclusion, based on these findings alone, that the securitization theory "has the same applicability in any socio-political context" remains doubtful (Ružić 2012: 14).

Drawing up a state of affairs of the similar research in Turkey, Pinar Bilgin raises the question of the politics around the use of a theory outside its milieu of origin (Bilgin 2011: 406/7). In this case, Turkish scholars of securitization actually politicize their own enterprise and rely on the theory's Western European assumptions, because their studies take place within the framework of Turkey's potential accession to the EU (Ibid: 408).

Some studies on securitization in the Western Balkans pursue a similar agenda without explicitly tackling the fundamental issue of theory traveling from one context to another. Such examples are Emma Hakala's (2012) research on environmental citizenship in Serbia and Jakešević and Tatalović's (2016) analysis of migration in Croatia. The findings of those two works will be presented in more detail in the final section.

Following this argument, inquiry in non-liberal-democratic societies must determine the specific characteristics that condition possible securitizing moves. In order to know whether an "extreme politicization" has taken place, one needs to take account of the rules of regular political processes, the usual dynamics of legitimization, the key characteristics of public communication and the role of public opinion in the societies in question.

Securitizing migration in changing contexts

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing tendency to observe migration as a security challenge in the West (Bourbeau 2011; Watson 2009). Besides environment and health, this is arguably one of the most frequently studied domains of securitization (Balzacq et al. 2016: 507). During the Cold War period, immigration came from neighboring countries, mainly those of Eastern Europe, including East Germany, and the overall numbers were not as important as they would become in the 1990s (Watson 2009: 5). As Bourbeau (2011: 1) suggests, the Western cases of "abrasive rhetoric" against migration have been particularly recurrent in the post-1989 period.

Ceyhan and Tsukala (2002:24) identify four main "axes" of arguments against immigration: socioeconomic (stress on employment and welfare), securitarian (related to the state's traditional role in assuring physical security), identitarian and political (aimed at obtaining benefits for the securitizing actors). Although the first three axes can be seen as politicized themselves, the latter category, however, appears to be substantially different at least in one important aspect. Whereas the

first three depict referential objects in grave danger, the "political axis" refers to the utility of the securitizing act for the actors.

Didier Bigo's application of the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to the problem of securitized migration can complement the understanding of the social sources of these processes. By establishing a widespread notion of anxiety (inquiétude), strengthened by 'technology of discipline', governments can try to justify the limitation of citizens' liberties – all of which is based on the deeply rooted dichotomy between "Us" and "Them", on a clear split between the "ours" and the outsiders (Bigo 1998: 11).

The fundamental perspective behind the securitization of migration from the dominant Western perspective contains this duality, exploited by securitizing actors. The idea of "Us" is thus coupled with the notion of being a target of migration flows. This entails the perception of centrality, desirability, attractiveness, value of the Western space and arguably opens possibilities for political use through securitization.

Security in the Western Balkans – adjusting the theoretical lenses

Even if the Balkans cannot be considered part of the traditional Third World, the region shares essential socio-political features with other Third World countries, especially "the arbitrary construction of their boundaries by external powers, the lack of societal cohesion, their recent emergence into juridical statehood, and their stage of development" (Acharya 1997: 307). In a similar vein, Todorova quotes W. E. B. Du Bois and his idea of "quasi-colonial" states, which included the Balkans, in which the formal independence of states merely masks the oppression, subordination and manipulation suffered by the people (Todorova 1997: 16). On the other hand, this perspective sits at odds with the anti-colonial notion of the Third World as a result of a massive liberation wave after WWII. Acharya's and Du Bois' respective positions reflect a profound doubt regarding the extent to which democratization has followed the independence of former colonies.

The ongoing debate regarding the application of securitization theory to the Third World will thus be considered valid for the case of this European region as well. The argument of this paper is that the Western Balkans are specific for the application of this theory because of three fundamental regional characteristics: 1) the cultural, and especially linguistic, features shared between most of the states; 2) the interconnected security dynamics within the larger Balkan region, which can call for the application of the Copenhagen School's concept of the regional security complex (the Balkans being a subcomplex in a wider European region); 3) the nature of the political processes in the region marked by post-socialist transition, post-conflict reconstruction and institution-building, all of which are deeply embedded in the process of European integration (including the EU's arguable authorship over the very concept of the Western Balkans region).

In the first place, the cultural backdrop needs to be considered if we are to understand the discursive security practices. Analyzing the idea of what constitutes the Balkans from the internal perspective, Maria Todorova finds the deep, underlying notion of the region representing "a bridge or a crossroads" between Asia and Europe, between the East and the West, while on the other hand failing to attain higher levels of development and emancipation. The Balkans are thus typically described as "semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental" (Todorova 1997: 15/16).

The quality of the Balkans as a region is derived from its relation to Europe, but not in a clear contrast with Europe as the "East" or the "Third World" tend to display – this region is marked by a rather ambiguous, complex mix of different characteristics that are considered different from to the European norm (Ibid: 17). For Bechev, Balkan "otherness" was instrumentalized during the Yugoslav conflicts, as the term "Balkan" represented a negative label (especially used by Slovenes and Croats) and was used in political discourse to denounce and derogate adversaries (Bechev, 2011: 72). Moreover, almost every ethnic group in the region cherishes the idea of itself as the key actor at the meeting point between the East and the West (often representing and defending the latter) (Ibid: 72-4). This cultural feature is important for the understanding of the modern-day discursive constructions regarding the migrant crisis.

In addition to this, the ex-Yugoslav countries constitute a space with very low, if any, linguistic barriers (Macedonia and Slovenia are outside of the former Serbo-Croatian linguistic area, but their languages maintain a high level of mutual intelligibility, and they remain deeply interconnected culturally to the rest of the post-Yugoslav countries). Keeping in mind the use of digital media and social networks, it is evident that political discourse can travel across the state borders in the Western Balkans extremely easily. It is difficult to limit one's audience to one particular state or ethnic groups.

Second, the region is regarded as a unique 'regional security complex'. A more recent definition of regional security complexes proposed by Copenhagen School authors is particularly relevant for this topic because it is formulated in the language of securitization: "...a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another" (Wæver 2004: 19).

The Balkans represent a particular case, not least because the outcome of the 1990s post-Yugoslav conflicts was decided by an external force, or in "Copenhagen" terms: "The outcome was not decided by internal Balkan dynamics but largely by the different securitisations external powers made of the Balkan situation" (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 377). The "overwhelming" power of external actors is presented as one of the region's specificities. Bilgin's (2011) conclusions on the political utility of securitization theory in assessing Turkey's relation to the EU (as presented above), can be analogously applied to the Western Balkans. Additionally, the EU has developed a specifically regional emphasis since the beginning of the integration processes in the 1990s. The EU has insisted on its own regional approach and on the importance of regional cooperation as part of membership conditionality, which can be considered as a Western Balkan specificity, in comparison to other post-Cold War waves of the EU enlargement (Demetropoulou 2002: 92).

Lastly, the political processes in the region are different both from those present in the Western Core and those proper to the Third World periphery. Additionally, the role of external actors is specifically important and formative for this region. The EU and NATO maintain a strong military presence in the region, while Russia and Turkey, respectively, display strategic interest in the Western Balkans. The European Union continues to exercise a strong influence over two interconnected processes: state-building and democratic transition (Bechev 2011; Troncotă 2011; Kovacevic 2011; Keil 2013). The legacy of conflicts, developmental challenges and transition shocks add to the overall security and migration-related problems (Papadopoulos 2011: 466). After the development of a specific regional approach through "stabilization and association", the EU has placed the transition, institution-building and development of the post-Yugoslav states within the framework of its enlargement policy – the authority of the institutions in the region was conceived "through reliance on

Union institutions, economic potential and policies" (Simic 2001: 33). As Troncotă notes, the EU is, by means of accession conditionality, arguably the dominant external catalyst of the state-building processes. On the other hand, she argues, "[t]he main obstacle for successful state-building in the WB is the lack of identification between state and society" (Troncotă 2011: 84). This resembles the weaknesses of some Third World states and societies, as elaborated above.

The importance of context, in particular at the external and international levels, has grown throughout the development of securitization studies, (Bourbeau 2011; Balzacq et al. 2016). In the case of the Western Balkans, the value of this multi-layer contextual perspective is even greater, keeping in mind the deep political and security ties between the local and the most important external, namely Western, actors. The EU is an involved actor and promotes cooperation with the Balkans, especially given that the region has historically been both the origin and the transit area for migration towards Central and Western Europe (Papadopoulos 2011: 452). However, the focus of this paper remains limited to the Western Balkans as a transit region. Simultaneously, the importance of the Western Balkans in terms of global security has decreased since the end of the violent conflicts in the early 2000s, which was also followed by a partial withdrawal of the United States and its military presence in the region, adding to the greater importance of the European actors (Seroka 2012: 496-98).

Stability and beyond: Western Balkan security as a matter of perspective

The migrant crisis has posed additional challenges to the Western Balkan countries, which had already been fraught with transition and "democratization" issues. According to the transnational NGOs such as Freedom House, the Democracy Index, and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, democracy has been weakened in the Western Balkan countries, especially since the mid-2000s (Anastasakis 2013; BiEPAG 2017). It should be stressed that, while moving away from consolidated democracy, the region is, however slowly, advancing towards both EU and NATO memberships.[5]Simultaneously, according to a recent UN analysis, the slow development in the region not only prolongs problems with poverty, but additionally exposes the region to risks of natural and technological disasters (UNDP 2016). Low results, both in achieving democratization and improved living conditions, point to the glaring failures in providing security in a broadened sense of the term, as the sectors *outside* the traditional military domain demonstrate a persistent inability of the state and political mechanisms to bring about improvement.

What is the Western perspective on this? What does *Western Balkansecurity* mean to the external actors? Two features appear to be essential for answering these questions. First, there is a formal EU and NATO dedication to the overall, inclusive, democratic, and very demanding improvement of non-military aspects of security. The conditionality in the integration process testifies to this, as a thorough transformation (in fact, transition) is required from the region's countries as the necessary adjustment before adhesion. On the other hand, the practice of the Western actors is dominantly directed towards maintaining *stability* in the region, which means a considerably more modest objective.

From the formal perspective, stability has represented a cornerstone objective in the post-conflict, late-1990s Western approach to the region. The important empirical data gathered by Sonja

[5] Albania and Croatia became NATO members in 2009, the latter joined the EU in 2013; Albania, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro are official EU-candidates, Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for candidate status; Montenegro is a small step away from the NATO membership as of April 2017; Serbia and the authorities in Kosovo are negotiating under the EU mediation, without official implication regarding the status of Kosovo. More information available at the EU and NATO official portals: europa.eu and nato.int.

Grimm and Okka Lou Mathis display the priorities shaping EU financial assistance to the region since 1991. According to the financial flows, humanitarian assistance has been the primary concern, followed by development (social and economic), and with direct support to democratization processes coming in at third place (Grimm and Mathis 2015: 942). Even if the other areas can be considered to indirectly support institution building, human rights protection and the rule of law, the authors conclude that the EU has favored *stability* as the initial and central value to be supported in the Balkans. While international concerns about Balkan security were focused on military conflicts fueled by nationalism, internal issues linked to the inefficiency of states have been looming on the inside (Krastev 2002: 45-47). In the opinion of some analysts, the insistence on stability contributed to “stabilitocracy”, which practically sees *security* as a mere absence of violence, such as that experienced in the 1990s, even if this does not preclude problems with democracy and development (BiEPAG 2017: 7). Furthermore, the investigation of the Common Security and Defense Policy in the Balkans shows that the regional approach is principally used to serve the EU’s internal security concerns, with internal Balkan concerns considered less important (Ioannides and Collantes-Celador 2011). In other words, the Western actors promote in practice a narrow version of security limited to maintaining stability in the region, which means not generating--and above all not exporting--violent conflicts.

Compared to the goal of stabilization, strengthening rule of law, democratic institutions and human rights protection through the EU conditionality has proven to be a significantly less important task, with modest results (Richter 2012: 510). Building on earlier criticism of *Europeanization* (mostly Frank Schimmelfennig), Richter shows that the formal democratization rhetoric of the EU matches the actual political outcomes only in the situations when it does not interfere with broader “geopolitical, economic and security interests” (Ibid: 513). Therefore, if EU representatives have to choose (or even *prefer* to choose) between pursuing democratization and resolving their own security concerns, they are far more likely to choose the latter.

Beyond the EU context and in a broader perspective, Mark Neocleous discusses the uses of security in the creation of entire economic-political orders. In the liberal capitalist order, created throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the notion of security has served to the liberal elites as means of justification. Even though the order provided protection for the workers as well, it has built a political setup in which freedom and law can be submitted to security, while facilitating the functioning and the reproduction of the capital (Neocleous 2008: 32-38). For the argument presented in this article, it is important to note Neocleous’ core idea at this point: security is susceptible to uses through which it is separated from freedom and from the rule of law, which leads to maintaining of the order which benefits the perpetuation of economic power relations. Analogously, a question can be raised whether the EU favors a version of (Western) Balkan security narrowed down to stability, for the purpose of establishing a capital-friendly zone free from major outbursts of violence, even though the democratic capacities within the region’s states remain underdeveloped.

The Balkan route during the migrant/refugee crisis – dynamics of securitization

Following the 2011 Arab Spring and the outbreak of conflicts throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East, the migration flows through the Balkan region started to intensify in 2012, and reached their peak in 2015.[6] The height of the crisis can be limited to the period between the closing

[6] http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/western-balkan-route/ According to the Frontex data: in 2015, more than 764,000 illegal individual crossings were detected in the region – 16 times as many as in 2014 (around 43,000) and six times as many as in 2016 (over 122,000).

of the Hungarian border with Serbia in June 2015, until the adoption of the EU-Turkey deal and the simultaneous closing of the Balkan route in March 2016.

The events between those two landmarks have been accompanied by various degrees of securitization. By measures proper to securitization we consider: the closure of borders, the deployment of the military in order to control the movement of migrants, the construction of fences and extraordinary reductions of the number of acceptable refugees and asylum seekers.

The following account represents a timeline with indicative moments that merit further investigation regarding their relevance to the process of securitization.[7] The objective of this section is not to provide a deep analysis and an actual application of securitization theory to this case, but rather to provide an account of the specific Western Balkan context in which securitization takes place. More precisely, we are interested in the measures taken by governments regarding the refugees and migrants. In this way, we will offer a contribution to the understanding of specific caveats for the application of the securitization theory to the Western Balkan countries, without actually tackling the local actors' discourses themselves. The examples of the non-Balkan actors are not the principal object of analysis, but they are necessary in order to trace the multilevel nature of this context.

The point of departure is therefore the announcement of the Hungarian government in June 2015 that the country's border with Serbia was to be closed and secured by a barbwire fence, in response to a growing number of migrants. This message was made public amid repeated use of force by the Hungarian police and military.[8] Budapest cited the protection of the Schengen area and of "Hungarian jobs" as the key motives for the decision.[9] Only weeks later, on 1st July 2015, the governments of Hungary and Serbia held a joint meeting in Budapest, pledging to "cooperate on the issue of migration," but with no specific reference to the border closure.[10]

In late August, two significant and contradictory events occurred only one week apart. First, the Macedonian government declared a state of emergency on the border with Greece, deployed the military and riot police and implemented force. Then, on 27 August, the second Western Balkans Summit gathered in Vienna the heads of state and government of the region's countries, as well as those of France, Germany and Slovenia, the EU member states affected by migration flows. The conference conclusions reiterated in the importance of cooperation and humanitarian assistance.[11] The apparent securitization at the national level therefore appeared to be balanced by desecuritizing commitments agreed upon multilaterally, under the EU member states' leadership.

The government of Serbia expressed a strong desecuritizing stance in October 2015. Prime Minister Vučić stated that Serbia would not "quarrel with those who build walls" and would itself refrain from such measures.[12]The occasion for this declaration is quite indicative: the Prime Minister was speaking at a conference on the refugee crisis where one of his co-panelists was the Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Michael Davenport. The head of the Serbian government was also quoted as saying that Serbia would not build "any walls in front of the refugees" regardless of other countries'

[7] A detailed timeline with elaborated facts can be found in Šelo Šabić and Borić (2016).
[8] http://s.telegraph.co.uk/graphics/projects/hungary/index.html
[9]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/17/hungary-closes-border-serbia-starts-building-fence-bar-migrants
[10]http://rs.n1info.com/a73457/Vesti/Zajednicka-sednica-srpske-i-madjarske-vlade.html
[11] - https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/20/macedonia-state-of-emergency-migrant-crisis
- http://www.globalresearch.ca/macedonian-government-cracks-down-on-refugees/5471593
- Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015
[12]http://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/vucic-srbija-se-nece-svadati-sa-onima-koji-dizu-ograde/1p9s718

measures, especially because he was "concerned about possible destabilization of the region".[13]Further prevention of securitization occurred at the end of October, when the Western Balkan leaders met again with their counterparts from the concerned European states and with the European Commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker. as the participants highlighted "serious problems" and pledged more cooperation and redistribution of responsibilities, but the German Chancellor Angela Merkel underlined that a definite solution had not been reached.[14] However, the adoption of "harder" security measures, particularly in a unilateral manner, was officially excluded.

Nevertheless, the following month brought additional challenges for the Western Balkans, as Austrian, German, and Slovenian authorities announced a more selective acceptance of refugees, as well as the construction of wire fences.[15]On 22 November 2015, European Council President Donald Tusk visited Macedonia and met Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, who asserted that his government would respect all multilateral, international decisions, but not without adding that "Macedonia has the right and duty to take steps to protect domestic interests".[16]

Exactly what Gruevski meant became evident in the following weeks when the National Security Council of Macedonia decided to deny entry to migrants who "were apparently not refugees", as well as to construct a wire fence and concentrate army and police forces on the border with Greece. As a result, only nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria would be admitted across the borders (Šelo Šabić and Borić 2016: 2). Tensions sporadically escalated into violence and even rubber bullets were reportedly fired at the migrants in early December 2015.[17] Prime Minister Gruevski offered claimed that it was necessary to protect not only the national, but also the European interest against the wave of so-called "economic migrants". Moreover, he referred to similar measures already adopted by "other European states", without specifying which ones.[18] Once again, a certain level of securitization was attained and implemented in the region while seeking justification by referring to the policies and actions among the EU Member States and at the European level. The pendulum of the Macedonian government's discourse has, nevertheless, swung at least marginally back to the more usual political domain (i.e. with far less coercive security measures proposed) around the end of the year. An example of this is Prime Minister Gruevski's opinion piece published in Newsweek – hence, for the Western audience as well – on 23 December 2015. While underscoring security issues, Gruevski put the greatest accent on the need for a common international effort to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees(?). The threat coming from the "economic migrants" and terrorists was stressed again:

> As a small country we are not able to jeopardize our ability to provide for these refugees by admitting economic migrants with no final destination in countries to our north. We are actively asking partners to help us communicate to non-refugee migrants that we cannot secure their transit north, as our resources are already stretched thin in providing for the humanitarian needs of the refugees transiting through our borders.[19]

With varying emphases on different levels of threats from migration, the Western Balkan leaders continued to voice support for cooperation and a humanitarian response, but above all under

[13]http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/vucic-srbija-nece-dizati-zidove
[14]http://www.politico.eu/article/commission-migration-proposal-draws-fire-merkel-refugee-merkel-juncker/
[15]https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/world/europe/slovenia-border-fence-migrants-refugees.html?_r=0
[16]http://meta.mk/en/gruevski-tusk-greater-coordination-between-macedonia-and-eu-needed-for-refugee-crisis/
[17]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/02/rubber-bullets-and-teargas-fired-in-riot-on-macedonian-border
[18]http://english.republika.mk/pm-gruevski-macedonia-acts-in-favor-of-national-refugee-and-europe-interests/
[19]Nikola Gruevski, We Must Work Together to Help the Migrants, Newsweek, 23 December 2015, http://www.newsweek.com/we-must-work-together-help-migrants-408654

the condition that their respective countries would not be considered the final destination of the migrants.[20] The Croatian minister of Interior Ranko Ostojić even publicly entertained the idea of admitting to Croatia only those migrants who would "sign a statement on intention to reach Austria or Germany".[21] Immediately prior to this, the Austrian government had introduced a yearly limit of 37.500 asylum seekers that their country would accept, clearly provoking a growing sense of insecurity among the Western Balkan states. The further securitization of this issue remained nevertheless limited by subsequent meetings and guarantees that followed, until March 2016. European Council President Tusk embarked on another Balkan tour during that month, stating in Zagreb that merely following the Schengen rules would not be sufficient to manage the crisis, and repeating the call for more coordination and joint effort among the countries, with EU assistance.[22]The new Croatian government (a right-wing majority had just succeeded the social-democrats at the helm) reiterated these assertions – apparently, some kind of extraordinary (securitized) measures was called for, but still dominantly within the domain of non-coercive and only partially security-based responses. Amid EU-Turkey negotiations regarding the migrant crisis, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia closed their borders to refugees and migrants from the Middle Eastern countries on March 9, with the EU backing.[23] Since the Balkan route was still perceived as potentially problematic, the government in Zagreb announced that in addition to closing the border, it was contemplating an additional deployment of the military to its eastern borders. In this case, internal disagreement was voiced mainly by the opposition social-democrats and security experts.[24] The overall attitude at this point in the crisis was summed up by the following assessment:

> Some countries, such as Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, took into account wider interests, especially those advocated by Germany. Due to the humanitarian approach advocated by Germany, which was the desired destination of a vast majority of refugees, Serbia and Croatia have accepted the humanitarian approach as well. (Jakešević and Tatalović: 1261)[25]

The objective of the study conducted by Jakešević and Tatalović was to assess the success of securitization in Croatia during 2015. Their perspective was set at two levels: micro (both domestic and regional) and macro (the EU and the member states) (Jakešević and Tatalović 2016: 1246). As for the key interests of the social-democratic government in power at the time, the authors argue that on the micro level the goal was to satisfy the needs of the liberal and left-wing segments of the electorate, whereas at the macro level the main concern was to "get the support from Germany in strengthening [Croatia's] foreign political position" (Ibid: 1253). The conclusion highlights the importance of Croatia's status as a country of transit (the Croatian government is less prone to securitization as long as the migrants continue to move westward) and the domestic concerns in which the split was evident between the left-wing humanitarian discourse and the right-wing parties' security concerns, interpreted as the echo of their respective electoral demands (Ibid: 1258-60). Although the authors mention the

[20]http://www.dw.com/sr/balkanska-ruta-samo-tranzit-molim/a-19000249
[21] Ibid.
[22]https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2016/03/02/tusk-in-zagreb-respecting-the-schengen-rules-will-not-solve-the-migration-crisis/
[23] - https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/europe/europe-refugee-crisis.html?_r=0
-http://www.vijesti.rtl.hr/novosti/hrvatska/1966951/ostojic-upozorava-da-se-reaktivira-tzv-balkanska-ruta-hrvatska-moze-postati-hotspot/
[24]https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/strucnjaci-smatraju-da-slanjem-vojske-na-granicu-trcimo-pred-rudo-20160303
[25] It remains a question to what extent the approach of the German government was actually 'humanitarian'. Although Berlin's policies have been mostly welcoming in 2015 and 2016, there has been a withdrawal of support for the immigration and a more restrictive approach. Moreover, even the more welcoming measures may be a product of interests other than humanitarian, such as the need to secure and rejuvenate German labor market. For an analysis of German approach in this matter see: https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2017/03/CYRAN/57230

transit status as one of the most important factors, they do not attempt to develop this statement, or other specific features of the case, into a more general contribution to the securitization theory.

As a middle-range theory, securitization needs contextualization into diverse social environments. This one is profoundly marked by its geographical position which is highly relevant for the issue of migration. In the most recent crisis, the (Western) Balkans were neither the source nor the desired final destination. Representing a transit area and a middle zone for migrants, Western Balkans do not share the position of the developed, Western societies that are the main target of migrations. Therefore, first of the specifically Balkan elements relevant for the securitization theory would be the notion of semi-periphery, present in this case in the form of migration transit.

Consequently, the conditions for securitization are considerably more influenced by exterior actors than in the Western cases. What the ‘core’ actors will decide remains very influential--in this case even decisive--for the regional leaders’ choice between humanitarian or hard security responses. All countries are interdependent and any government’s political choices happen in at least a Putnam-style two-level setting – in other words, no country could be considered impermeable to the effects of exterior factors. In the Balkans, however, this look to the outside is substantially different: there is a core of states that actually attract migration and which, at the same time, represent the most important, powerful points of political orientation.

This is even more important given the political, economic, security and social ties between the Western Balkans and the EU core. Despite the signs of some rival strategies in this area, most notably Russian and Turkish, and to some extent Chinese, the region is still politically marked by the process of political-economic transformation that simultaneously fulfills a threefold function: post-socialist transition, post-conflict reconstruction and integration to the EU. Therefore, it is not just a mere geographical fact of being “somewhere in the middle” that depicts this link to the powerful EU Member States – it is the nature of relations, essentially political and politicized, that informs the scope for the policy choices within the region. Western Balkan leaders’ continuous reference to the “international solutions”, the “EU guidance” and, more specifically “decisions of Germany” are telling signs of this framework.

Finally, the region’s transition and political-economic relations to the West produce specific contextual elements for securitization. Security analyses need to consider the challenges of transition and problems with the incorporation of liberal-democratic values into the Western Balkan societies. The region’s countries are deeply involved in the European integration processes, which requires economic liberalization and deep social and political transformations. Issues such as the weaknesses of democratic instruments and institutions, the lack of capacities for a successful functioning in liberal economic environment and slow development, affect the security concerns and represent unavoidable elements in the understanding of regional security dynamics.

Conclusion

The argument presented here is an attempt to point to the specific challenges of applying securitization theory to the case of international migration in the Western Balkans. The conclusions can be formulated within four main theses.

First, the internal conditions of transformation, transition and institution-building do not favor the application of standard liberal-democratic norms of “usual” political measures while assessing

securitization. The "normal" in this case needs to be re-conceptualized, especially bearing in mind that these political measures are constantly evolving, and institutions, democracy and overall political "normality" are still in the process of construction in the Western Balkans, notwithstanding the EU membership.

Second, the geographic position affects discourses. Securitizing agents tend to include geopolitical premises in their attempts to justify securitization and this territorial dimension is being used to sustain the notion of the specific historical-geopolitical role in order to gain consent for harder security measures. The self-identification of the Western Balkans as a sentinel between two worlds is a useful asset for the securitizing speech concerning the ("so-called") threat posed by the "migration crisis", in which the East-West problematic is strikingly on display. In the West, securitization of migration rests on the idea of two essentially different spaces, socially and geographically. This dyad is composed of rather simplified visions: "our territory" (geographic aspect) and "us" (the social-political aspect) opposed to "theirs" and "them"- the realization of "other". This is the rough sketch of the basic securitizing ontology from the perspective of the Western core. Studies of migration as a security threat show this clear-cut vision, as well as the numerous ways in which individuals can take advantage of this basic setting through powerful speech acts. In the Balkans, the ontology is mainly built on the crossroads-bridge perception, with two external dimensions to consider, two forms of "otherness". Therefore, in this particular case, a specific political geography is constructed from the standpoint of a middle land. This opens a more complex multilevel view of the problem of securitizing migration in the semi-periphery, as the perspective of territories of transit is simultaneously oriented towards the two extremities of global migration flows – zones of conflict and the 'promised land' of the West.

This leads to the third thesis, which is that both the political relations among the states in the region and between them and the more powerful external actors must be taken into account when assessing securitization. At the regional international (and transnational) level, cultural interconnections and essentially instantaneous cross-border communication make it difficult to isolate exclusive audiences, and it is very likely that messages originating in one country will instantly produce effects in other countries in the region as well.

Building on the previous theses, the final caveat concerns the very *idea* of security that different actors have. The Balkan route case has shown a confirmation of the EU's approach to security primarily as stability in the Balkans. The messages and measures of the domestic, regional leaders eventually converged with those of the EU and its most prominent actors. A deeper and wider idea of security encompassing the rule of law, strong democratic institutions, development, environmental protection, etc. was marginalized by the primary concern of choosing a balance through border control and the regulation of migration flows. It is striking that, regardless of the stark differences and disputes among the EU Member States' governments, the Western Balkan leaders' perceptions on security appear to have converged with the EU's key concept of stability.

The question of leadership and initiative among EU Member States is particularly relevant for the last thesis, and deserves further investigation. As shown above, Western Balkan leaders use Germany's demands as political tools and can help tackle the issue of leadership among governments in matters of migration.

More generally, the region is dominated by a structured, normalized and strategic relation to the European Union. The influence of European governments and the EU institutions over Western Balkans countries appears to be very high in security issues, and this relation can be additionally understood and analyzed from the perspective of securitization. Furthermore, the region is split between members and candidates of the EU or, even more challenging, between members, candidates and (reluctant) partners of NATO. Studying securitization longitudinally and comparing the cases before and after the Albanian and Croatian accession to NATO in 2009 would be of additional value for the understanding of this multilevel security theater. The consequent research-related caveat is to avoid the analysis of isolated, individual states, or even the entire region, without taking into account the influential external actors.

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