The Effect of Securitization on European Perception of Security

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Drawing from a community to monitor treaty parties' steel and coal consumption, the European security community has evolved throughout the decades. Once known as Fortress Europe, European security is now a complex set of perceptions, concepts and practices. The strategic development of conceptual European security started with European Union's Security Strategy in 2003. From this point of view the development of European security policy has followed typical strategic processes with updated strategies every three to five years. What differs from typical strategic planning is that the European security strategies shift their focus from comprehensive security (2003) to internal security issues (2005, 2008, 2010), then to global security (2015, 2016) and back to comprehensive, or whole-of-society, security (2020).

Shift in security paradigm has widened the referent object beyond the state and brought it to micro-level [1]. Furthermore, to promote the integration, EU sees security communal by nature. Burgess (2009) encapsulated the idea of European security as follows:

> *The ambition of a Europe-wide approach to security has grown into a complex constellation involving national cultures, institutional norms, political agendas, local perceptions and global needs, all in an attempt to standardize and create a systematic juridical, institutional and technical approach to the threats that Europe faces today.* [2]

The idea of communal security has evolved into comprehensive view as it was perceived in Security Strategy (2003) and now in EU Security Union Strategy (2020). The aim of the Global Strategy was to build a stronger Europe with shared values and cooperation within Member States against the threats towards the security community. The EU Security Union Strategy will bring European Union back to comprehensive view on security [3], still protecting the European values – *respecting and*

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[1] Buzan, Barry and Hansen, Lene: *The Evolution of International Security Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 187-225..

[2] Burgess, J. Peter: There is no European Security, Only European Securities. *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association Vol. 44(3)*, Sage Publications 2009, p. 310.

[3] European Commission (2020). COM(2020) 605 final. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on The Eu Security Union Strategy*. Brussels 2020, p. 2.

upholding the rule of law, equality and fundamental rights and guaranteeing transparency, accountability and democratic control [4].

However visible the Europe-wide approach to security may be in the strategies and security practices, Burgess argues that security is not that unambiguous when it comes to value-based perception of threats and security [5]. According to Burgess `*[a] security threat is threatening precisely because it stems from what we value and what we fear*' [6]. Hence, if accepting the premise of common European values, threats endangering the social contracts and human security are the most significant European threats. Consequently, values are the very constructions of Europe to be united and the whole European identity. In order to protect the European way of life [7], the European Union must ground its integrated practices into common values for them to be legitimate in the eyes of the EU citizens.

Climate-related threat perceptions have become the most significant factor on global security agenda during the past ten years. Extreme weather conditions, natural disasters and failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation have been assessed to be the most relevant threat images in terms of likelihood and impact. According to World Economic Forum the five most likely global risks consist of data theft, cyber-attacks and the three environmental threats listed above. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) stand their ground as the most significant threat in terms of impact. However, the use of WMD is considered less likely than the climate-related risks. [8]

European Union (EU) recognizes the climate-related threats in its security strategies. In addition to climate-related risks EU has terrorism, crime, hybrid threats, economic instability and energy supply on its security agenda. Fragile states and the geopolitical conflict have both held the top positions on global risk assessments and EU security agenda but seem absent in climate- and cyber-framed security perception of 2020's. [9]

This on-going study makes three main contributions to constructivist securitization studies. On the empirical level it examines the shift visible in threat perceptions and utilizes Eurobarometer data in security studies. On the epistemological level it offers a new framework for securitization analysis by adopting quantitative methods to securitization studies. And finally, on theoretical level it takes part

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[4] EU 2020, p. 1.
[5] Burgess (2009), p. 309-310.
[6] Ibid. p. 309.
[7] EU 2020, p. 1.
[8] World Economic Forum: Global Risks 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 ja 2019, https://www.weforum.org.
[9] EU 2020

in the ever-developing discussion about securitization framework and the concept of comprehensive security. Altogether this study offers a new insight on European threat construction and how it can be visualized by using data from Eurobarometer surveys.

The research problem of statistical analysis addresses the question about securitization having an impact on the European perception of security. Index events are not processed as qualitative causal chains, but viewed as catalysts for securitization, fuel for political speech-acts and an intertextual framework for perceiving security practices.

The main research question is: **How has securitization affected the European citizens' perception of security in the 2010's**. The main research question discusses the shift in the security issues seen as most important facing the European Union during the past ten years. A preliminary examination based on published reports from Eurobarometer surveys suggests that according to public opinion, immigration, terrorism and climate change have emerged as major challenges for the European Union during the past ten years. Issues did not significantly affect the perception of security in the beginning of the period (15% terrorism, 14% immigration and 5% climate change), but coming to the end of the period 40% of respondents considering immigration as the main challenge, 20% terrorism and 16% climate change.