

# Militarization of borders: migration flows and the Schengen regime

## La militarización fronteriza: flujos migratorios y régimen de Schengen

Marta Zorko<sup>a\*</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8458-7384>

Robert Mikac<sup>a</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4568-6299>

Rory Yoder<sup>b</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2144-4762>

<sup>a</sup> University of Zagreb, Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb, Croatia, e-mail: marta.zorko@fpzg.hr, robert.mikac@fpzg.hr

<sup>b</sup> Olmsted Foundation, Washington, DC, United States, e-mail: rorrence@protonmail.com

### Abstract

This article explores the paradox of a globalized cooperative world that appears conducive to openness, yet simultaneously witnesses the proliferation of closed borders, physical barriers, and increased border militarization. The objective is to research, analyze, and categorize the various types of border militarization, offering both theoretical and practical perspectives. We propose new definitions for border militarization to encompass its diverse expressions, ranging from overt to subtle forms. This study focuses on border militarization within Europe, specifically in peripheral countries on the outer fringes of the European Union's Schengen regime, employing a comparative case study methodology. It provides in-depth insights into two similar cases and practical militarization following the 2015-2016 European migration crisis in Croatia and Poland. While the research has limitations, including its eurocentric focus and limited generalizability, the conclusions shed light on post-migration crisis long-term effects in Europe and the growing phenomenon of subtle and covert border militarization.

**Keywords:** border militarization, Schengen area, European Union (EU), migration crisis.

### Resumen

Se explora la paradoja de un mundo globalizado y cooperativo que parece propicio para la apertura, pero que presencia la proliferación de fronteras cerradas, barreras físicas y aumento de militarización en las fronteras. El objetivo es investigar, analizar y categorizar diferentes tipos de militarización en las fronteras con perspectivas tanto teóricas como prácticas. Se proponen nuevas definiciones para la militarización en las fronteras que abarcan desde formas evidentes hasta sutiles. Este estudio se centra en la militarización es-

Received on February 3, 2023.

Accepted on August 31, 2023.

Published on October 16, 2023.

\* Corresponding author: Marta Zorko.  
E-mail: marta.zorko@fpzg.hr



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Atribución 4.0 Internacional.

CÓMO CITAR: Zorko, M., Mikac, R. & Yoder, R. (2023). Militarization of borders: migration flows and the Schengen regime [La militarización fronteriza: flujos migratorios y régimen de Schengen]. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 24, e127. <https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.2316127>

pecíficamente en países periféricos en los márgenes exteriores del régimen Schengen de la Unión Europea, utiliza una metodología de estudio de casos comparativos. Ofrece una visión profunda de dos casos similares y de la militarización práctica posterior a la crisis migratoria europea de 2015-2016 en Croacia y Polonia. Las conclusiones arrojan luz sobre los efectos a largo plazo de la crisis migratoria en Europa y el creciente fenómeno de la militarización fronteriza sutil y encubierta, pese a las limitaciones de la investigación, con enfoque eurocéntrico y generalizado.

Palabras clave: militarización de fronteras, espacio Schengen, Unión Europea (UE), crisis migratoria.

## Introduction

This paper examines the militarization of the European Union's (EU) outer border in two case studies—Croatia and Poland—. Although at the time of the 2015-2016 migrant crisis these two countries were not in the same Schengen status, both experienced *migrant pressure* during and right after the crisis. This pressure resulted in different measures taken by the state to preserve the border and included non-military and military-related methods. Since military presence at the borders of sovereign states is not the most usual practice in democratic societies, especially in European regional context, it is important to analyze the background behind such actions.

This paper is divided into four main parts. Introduction is used to explain researchers' standpoints and topic relevance. Theoretical part debates new forms and definitions of border mobilization offering a theoretical insight as well as State-of-the-Art regarding the process of hardening borders. Next part is research oriented and gives in-depth analysis of two similar case studies—Croatia and Poland—related to border militarization phenomenon in Europe after the 2015-2016 migration crisis. Conclusion(s) offer comparative results and suggest next steps in this area of the research.

The first aim is to compare the aforementioned actions and determine whether they constitute a part of the process of border militarization. The main outcome should be the multilayered and comprehensive definition of the militarization of borders in the 21st century in particular aforementioned context. Potential generalization in this case is not intentional, although similar examples can be found in global context as well. However, geographical scope of this paper is oriented towards European continent and dynamics between EU (supranational level), particular EU member states (national level) and its Neighborhoods (capital N and plural are used intentionally since European neighborhoods are defined through EU documents). Although Neighborhoods are consisted of non-integrated neighboring countries those countries are not included in the analysis because the focus of the paper is not on bilateral relations or joint border management, but on the unilateral EU militarization that occurs in response to asymmetrical threats and non-state related security challenges.

The second aim of the paper is to show how border militarization functions in practice during and immediately following the migration crisis in 2015-2016 using two cases. This research shows what types of militarization related to borders exist in the contemporary environment, as well as how they were used after said crisis.

The presented case studies of Croatia and Poland are examples for comparison via the most similar research method. Both countries are EU member states in a

geographically peripheral position. Both are on the outer European border, and both were heavily influenced with migration pressure after the migration crisis. They are not part of same migrant route but were influenced by the same migrant flow processes which originated in the Middle East. The focus on land borders and land mobilities emanate from regional perspective (Europe), geopolitical background (centre-periphery relations and circles of belonging as well as Schengen dualism), and imprint that 2015-2016 migration crisis left on European security architecture. In both cases there is presumption of the border militarization which will be further discussed.

Although not comparable by size or geographical position, both countries are culturally similar, and part of the same integrations (EU, North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and initiatives (e. g., The Three Seas Initiative). Poland has been a part of the Schengen space since 2007, and Croatia entered this year (2023). Although newly accepted in the Schengen agreement, Croatia has been introducing Schengen measures since its EU membership in 2013 and implementing them along the border during the researched period. The Schengen agreement is a legal agreement between European states that enables the concept of free movement of people between its signatories. Dating from the end of the last century, it is a frame for implementing European freedoms integrated in the very core of the European idea. That means that member states of the Schengen agreement have no border control on their inner borders. To enable such free movement, the outer border (toward third countries) must be solid and resistant to threats originating from the *outside*.

The process of changing the border to meet the requirements of the Schengen agreement is known as re-bordering. With this process comes the assumed vanishing of inner border regimes and the externalization of only one common, outer border (Casas-Cortes et al., 2012; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2021; Marcu, 2015). It is expected that the pressure towards such a border is higher, or at least that the movement towards it should be *more visible* (recorded and reported). Such a common border is constituted from national borders of geographically peripheral member countries, so the practical level of implementation of the Schengen regime mechanisms, although unified and defined, depends on the capabilities of each member state in question. For common regulation along the outer border the EU established Frontex. Formed in 2004 for control of operative cooperation along outer EU border, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) “helps EU countries and Schengen associated countries manage their external borders”, in addition to helping to “harmonize border controls across the EU” and promoting “cooperation between border authorities in each EU country, providing technical support and expertise” (European Union, n. d.).

Although the outer border is considered a common EU border, respective stretches of it fall under the authority of each particular member state. The 2015-2016 migration crisis resulted in what was called a *Schengen paradox*. Member states individually, one by one, decided to temporarily suspend their implementation of the Schengen regime and regain national administrative and security controls along their national borders. At the same time, the outer Schengen border was porous for everyday migration flows, especially along the Balkan route (the entry point of Schengen at that time was Slovenia). Thus, the *Schengen paradox* reflected the exact opposite situation of what was envisioned in the Schengen system as it played out during the migration crisis. The inner European borders between member states were closed or under surveillance, while the outer one was porous with a daily intake of up to 10 000 people. As the Migration Policy Institute reports, “more than 1 million asylum seekers and other

migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and countries farther afield such as Pakistan and Nigeria arrived in EU countries in 2015, the most ever recorded in a single year” (Terry, 2021). The Institute further lamented that,

with the bloc lacking an effective mechanism to share the burden of responding to these asylum claims, Member States in the south and east faced a disproportionate impact as arrivals surged and continued at significant rates into 2016. The migration challenge quickly became continental, threatening to undermine the decades-long project of European integration and shatter the notion of Europe as a singular entity that could speak with one voice. (Terry, 2021)

For example, during the crisis in 2015-2016, more than half a million people went through Croatia. Croatia was only a transit country during the crisis but remained a popular entry point after the crisis for illegal border crossing attempts. During the crisis there was a clear geographical pattern of movement that included specific roles played by specific EU countries (Zorko, 2018). The pattern is geographic because countries reacted in accordance with their respective geographic positions and could be divided into *transition* countries (peripheral EU countries) and *destination* countries (developed EU core countries). However, countries could also be classified as *indifferent* (peripheral countries that closed their borders with barbed wire during the migration crisis, namely Hungary, turning migration flows towards other soft spots) or *self-included* (core countries that weren't destination countries but decided to help with financial or humanitarian aid) (Zorko, 2018).

The strong divisions between EU member states and other European countries based on geographical logic highlighted the significance of land borders and land-based movements. This was a shift from past migrant routes and irregular migration processes that primarily focused on Mediterranean and the EU's maritime borders. The resolution of the migration crisis was marked by the Joint Action Plan in March 2016, which followed the joint EU-Turkey statement. This agreement underscored that the EU alone was incapable of managing the migration crisis. The agreement is correctly being called “a blueprint”, since it sets a new European “strategy of externalizing migration management to its neighbors” (Terry, 2021). Writing for the Migration Policy Institute in 2021, Kyilah Terry noted:

In March 2016, the EU entered into a landmark agreement with Turkey, through which hundreds of thousands of migrants had transited to reach EU soil, to limit the number of asylum seeker arrivals. Irregular migrants attempting to enter Greece would be returned to Turkey, and Ankara would take steps to prevent new migratory routes from opening. In exchange, the EU agreed to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on a one-to-one basis, reduce visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, pay six billion euros in aid to Turkey for Syrian migrant communities, update the customs union, and re-energize stalled talks regarding Turkey's accession to the EU. Turkey was at the time the largest refugee-hosting country in the world. (Terry, 2021)

After the agreement, large daily migration flows were officially stopped, which opened possibilities of irregular and illegal everyday attempts along outer Schengen

border (the case of Croatia), and instrumentalized use of migrants (the case of Poland). In both cases, new forms of border militarization were brought into practice, and these new forms will be henceforth scientifically defined and explained.

## Militarization of borders in the 21st century

In the contemporary world, while the openness of globalization, virtual presence and cyber space are widely debated, there is increasing evidence of physical obstacles multiplying along the borders of national states. As Reece Jones commented, “in 2012, there were about 35 border walls globally; in 2017 there are almost 70” (Jones & Ferdoush, 2018, p. 14). Without guessing, the numbers are even higher today as new border barriers are being built daily. In Europe there is evidence of physical border obstacles in numerous cases, with a European Parliament Briefing noting that “the number of border walls and fences worldwide has increased dramatically in recent decades” (Dumbrava, 2022, p. 1).

The Briefing added that the figure “also holds for the EU/Schengen area, which is currently surrounded or criss-crossed by 19 border or separation fences stretching for more than 2 000 kilometers (km)”, and that “between 2014 and 2022, the aggregate length of border fences at the EU’s external borders and within the EU/Schengen area grew from 315 km to 2 048 km” (Dumbrava, 2022, p. 1). The Briefing further commented that, “in the past two decades, the number of border fences at the EU/Schengen borders has risen from 0 to 19 [...and] by 2022, 12 EU/Schengen countries have built fences at one or more sections of their borders” (Dumbrava, 2022, p. 1). With the proliferation of these physical barriers has also arrived evidence of hardening border regimes via other means.

The hardening and militarization of border regimes is evident in the use of sophisticated equipment for border supervision. In 2015, the EU revised border legislation and cooperation under the Smart Borders Program. As noted by the European Commission:

[The program] was announced in both the European Agenda on Migration and the European Agenda on Security.

The European Agenda on Security underlines that common high standards of border management are essential to prevent cross-border crime and terrorism. It underlines that the revised proposal on Smart Borders will help to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of border management. It also underlined the importance of ensuring better information exchange, including through keeping existing instruments under review and filling gaps in coverage.

The European Agenda on Migration stresses that in order to manage the external Schengen borders more efficiently there is a need to make better use of the opportunities offered by IT systems and technologies. It refers to the three existing systems: Eurodac (to deal with the administration of asylum), VIS (for managing visa applications) and SIS (for sharing of information on persons and objects for which an alert has been created). The Entry-Exit System represents a new tool for increasing the efficiency of border crossings and facilitating crossings for “bona fide” travellers, whilst at the same time strengthening the fight against

irregular migration by creating a record of all cross-border movements by third country nationals. (European Commission, 2016)

Along with the common program, each member state invests in its surveillance programs. In general EU and its member states tend towards sophisticated use of artificial intelligence (Dumbrava, 2021). Nonetheless, “in the course of history, states have been quick to co-opt ‘new’ technologies to solve the typically modern problem of accurately identifying individuals for the purpose of controlling mobility and tackling crime” (Dumbrava, 2021, p. 1). Along with the aforementioned surveillance techniques, military equipment as well as military presence in the everyday practice of border control becomes more and more frequent. In European context, it is not usual for democratic states to use military force for border control. Thus, the question becomes why such practices occur, and what are the key triggers for such actions.

One of the answers lies in the phenomenon of the securitization of migrations (Bourbeau, 2011; Džidić, 2020; Fauser, 2006; Ferreira, 2018). When a social process or phenomenon (such as migration) is being securitized, it is considered as a part of security system and becomes a security problem. Solutions for security challenges are sought inside a security system and often include military responses. But, besides military presence at the borders in the time of crisis there are other forms of border militarization that should be taken into consideration. The first level of militarization is classic military use or military presence involved and legally presumed by a country’s legislation in a time of crisis. Such a state of emergency is considered legal and legitimate border militarization under traditional definitions of national security (as an opposite to contemporary definitions of critical security studies).

Nevertheless, military presence at the borders is not the only phenomenon which should be considered border militarization and hardening of border regimes. The phenomenon Reece Jones and Md. Azmeary Ferdoush (2018) explained as border externalization often leads towards border militarization by other means or by other parties. Other means refer to technological and surveillance devices while other parties refer to third (often undemocratic) countries in the neighborhood. Guarding one’s border in third countries where positive laws do not apply leaves vast space for manipulation outside of human rights prerogatives. Such instances of *security outsourcing* often involve not only the questionable process of transferring control to potentially authoritarian countries but also might reflect a biased perception of who is entitled to human rights within the country that outsources its border control. Militarization by other means or *third-party militarization* happens because of the practice of externalization of border security. Pushing border-related security challenges, such as migration flows, towards *other spaces*—containment camps in neighboring countries or buffer zones made from neighboring countries are examples of common solutions which influential countries use for migration regulation:

In addition to expansion of security practices at borders, many states are externalizing border enforcement through agreements with neighboring countries. Border externalization means that much of the work of enforcing the border is done by transit states that are not the final destination of people in the move (Casas-Cortes et al., 2012, 2015; Collyer, 2007, 2013; Collyer & King, 2015).

The United States has deals with Canada and Mexico to push its borders outside of the actual borderline; the EU has signed deals with Turkey, Morocco and Afghanistan that enlist these countries to patrol for potential migrants and prevent them from reaching the edges of the EU. (Jones & Ferdoush, 2018, p. 15)

In both excluded spaces—either migrant camps or *borrowed borderline*—military (over)use is more than welcome and encouraged financially by interested parties. In such spaces strict (military) regimes are urged and there are no *unnecessary* questions asked, meaning the human rights of people on the move are often violated. It is interesting how the EU agreed to the EU-Turkey joint action regarding migration flows while by the same token it held human rights issues against Turkey in its membership accession process.

Another form of border militarization is already mentioned use of military equipment for border surveillance. Although this type of militarization does not include the official use of military forces, it includes the use of military equipment by other security sector bodies of the state. Such measures in border control are often planned and executed through positive state laws and strategies but nonetheless could be defined as *technical border militarization*.

A fourth kind of border militarization is represented by different types of battle groups or paramilitary forces involved in the process of border control. Official, unofficial, or self-organized *border guards* represent semi-legal and *ad hoc* actions of border control as well as border militarization. The example of *ad-hoc border militarization* is the case of Croatia where there was evidence of migrant pushbacks but without clear understanding of who was accountable for such actions. Another example is the Slovenian self-proclaimed paramilitary organization Štajerska straža and their actions during the migration crisis in 2015-2016. (Večernji list, 2019).

Finally, the fifth kind is *provoked border militarization*. This type includes classical military presence along the border after being exposed to provoked crisis by a third party or neighboring state. The example for this kind of militarization is the case of the Belarus-EU border crisis in 2021-2022, where Belarus used migrants as a weapon against Poland and provoked migrant crisis along the EU borderline. Also referred to as the Belarus-Poland crisis since Poland's eastern border was a major point of pressure, this case showed how such militarization functions in practice. The above examples could and should be broadly reconsidered outside the EU context and included in the contemporary definition of border militarization in the future. Two of them are further elaborated in detail—the case studies of Croatia and Poland.

## Republic of Croatia and *soft* border militarization

The Croats as a people inhabited areas of Southeastern Europe at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century. Most of them settled in the area outlined by the Adriatic Sea, the Alps, and the rivers Danube, Tisa, Drina, Mura, and Drava. Over the following centuries, they created a state that included a defined territory, a national ruling dynasty, a coat of arms, and a standing army, in addition to a legislative state assembly. As a small nation, they constantly had to fight against invaders, and as a result they eventually lost their statehood from the beginning of the 11th century and

did not regain it until the end of the 20th century. Many events in the 20th century created conditions for the independence of numerous small nations that existed within multinational states, such as the “end of the Cold War, the withdrawal of the USSR from the world’s political stage as a ‘superpower’, the voluntary dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Europe” (Kačić, 1998, p. 148).

Croatia took advantage of the tumultuous circumstances during this period and succeeded in reestablishing itself as a sovereign state. The nation gained international recognition in 1992 while it waged a war for independence and for the liberation of occupied territories from 1991 to 1995. In winning the war, it managed to peacefully reintegrate the remaining parts of Croatian territory in 1998. Since gaining independence, Croatia strongly committed itself to Euro-Atlantic values as demonstrated by joining world and Western organizations. Upon becoming a member of the United Nations in 1992, Croatia focused its foreign policy on joining political, security and economic Western structures. To demonstrate its readiness and ability to be a responsible member of Western values and initiatives, the nation started to participate very actively in numerous UN, NATO and EU peacekeeping operations and missions beginning in 1999. This participation resulted in a clearer path to full membership of the organizations to which Croatia aspired. Thus, in 2009, it became a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance, in 2013, a full member of the EU, and at the beginning of 2023, a full member of the Schengen area and the Eurozone (monetary union), making the nation fully integrated into all the key contemporary European and Western institutions. The effort put forth by Croatia was both acknowledged and lauded—2017 the U. S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said that Croatia “is a small country, but [... it] punches [... and] fights above its weight” (Mattis & Krsticevic, 2017).

From a geostrategic point of view, Croatia is located in the area of Southeastern Europe that connects Western Europe, Central Europe and the Mediterranean, which reflects the characteristics of its history, culture, architecture and gastronomy. As reported on its EU website, Croatia stretches from Vukovar in the northeast, past Zagreb in the west, and to Dubrovnik in the far south, gaining most of its present-day contours since the end of the 17th century and with a surface area of 56 594 square kilometers, making it the 19th largest European country. According to the 2021 Census, Croatia has less than four million inhabitants (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022), while significant parts of its population live in other countries. For example, in neighboring Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croats are one of the three constituent nations, and there is widespread Croatian emigration around the world with many Croats becoming economic migrants in Western Europe over the last few decades.

### *Regional dynamics: Western Balkans and Western Balkan route*

It has become customary to use the method of generalization to divide certain geographical areas into regions to distinguish a certain set of countries that have similar historical, political, transitional, security, cultural and other characteristics to a common denominator, regardless of how much the generalization truly matches each country. While it has already been stated that Croatia is located in the area of

Southeast Europe, many additionally classify it to be in the region of the Western Balkans. At the same time, many Croats do not agree with this contention because, in a political sense, the term *Balkan* represents everything that Croatia does not want to be and from which desires to move away. But the western Balkans are a globally known phrase and, as noted by NATO, “few regions in the world can claim a cultural, religious and demographic diversity richer than the Western Balkans” (Andreychuk, 2018).

The dynamic environment of the Western Balkans (which consists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Albania) serves as an important political and security variable which affects Croatia, its political activity, and its security situation. The EU has stated that it is “fully committed to the EU integration of the Western Balkans” as part of a “shared strategic objective that unites the entire region and the EU” (European External Action Service, 2022). Currently talks are underway with Montenegro and Serbia for accession to the EU, and in March 2020, the European Council “agreed to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania” (European External Action Service, 2022).

Additionally, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are “potential candidates for EU membership” (European External Action Service, 2022), while Kosovo is not recognized as full-fledged state by all members of the EU. Kosovo and Serbia are engaged in an international conflict over sovereignty and the issue of statehood, where Serbia considers Kosovo to be integral to its territory. In military and security terms, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia are full-fledged members of NATO. Kosovo is currently seeking NATO membership, while Bosnia and Herzegovina remain internally divided on whether or not to join and Serbia professes itself to be a militarily neutral country. On the other hand, Serbia maintains favorable relations with the Russian Federation and presents itself as Russia’s most reliable partner in Europe. And despite the complex situation in the Western Balkans, the EU still strives to fully integrate each nation in the region. The Western Balkans are at the heart of Europe and are geographically surrounded by EU Member States, thus making the EU accession process the centerpiece of EU relations in the region. As EU high representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell said, “the EU is not complete without the Western Balkans” (European Commission, 2021).

The area of the Western Balkans presents a source of potential political and security challenges for Croatia. In 2017, Croatia’s National Security Strategy confirmed this sentiment by stating that “political instability, insufficiently developed state institutions, corruption, high rate of unemployment, and social and interethnic tensions make the security situation in our southeastern neighborhood fragile” (Croatian Parliament, 2017, pp. 7-8). The Strategy further discusses how the southeastern neighborhood “is still dominated by the Euro-Atlantic influence”, yet is still vulnerable to “the influence of other global and regional actors” which could bring “geopolitical competitions and different destabilizing influences” (Croatian Parliament, 2017, pp. 7-8) from outside the region. There is a preponderance of political and security threats in the region.

Trends of intolerance, radicalism and extremism are on the rise, in addition to radical nationalism based on “greater state” ideologies which espouse ideas about changing internationally recognized borders. Additionally, a blatant defamatory campaign directed against the Republic of Croatia was launched with all the features of hybrid threats which include planned, permanent, and systematic activities supported by state bodies. Moreover, organized criminal groups operate routes for trafficking

arms, people, drugs, and other dangerous substances extensively within the region, making Southeast Europe one of the busiest migration transit routes. Each of the above circumstances provide necessary context for the analysis of political activities and events both in Croatia and in the region of the Western Balkans during the migration crisis which took place from 2015 to 2016.

### *Migration crisis of 2015-2016*

The causes of the 2015-2016 migrant crisis are well-known events associated with the Middle East, primarily the war in Syria and German Chancellor Angela Merkel's invitation to Syrian refugees to come to Germany. However, along with Syrian refugees, hundreds of thousands of people from the Middle East and North Africa started their journey to Germany and other Western European countries, who perceived the situation to be a unique opportunity to reach their desired destinations. As noted by Jakešević, a degradation of some of the "fundamental principles of the functioning of the EU" resulted from EU member states not being able to agree on a common solution to this crisis, and this lack of agreement also "initiated a redefinition of European policy in the field of asylum and migration" (Jakešević, 2017, p. 184). Another consequence of the crisis was the collection of many challenges and disagreements which emerged among EU institutions, EU member states and countries along the so-called Western Balkan migrant route from Turkey to Western Europe.

Due to the large influx of refugees and migrants, many countries on the Western Balkan route made the political decision to adhere to their legal systems only partially, thus selectively enforcing laws pertaining to state border control, asylum, and aliens residing within their borders. According to Tadić et al., the opening of a corridor for the uncontrolled influx of migrants "collapsed the legal and security order of the EU" (Tadić et al., 2016, p. 15). The most visible consequence of this "collapse" was the entry of hundreds thousand migrants into the territory European of the Union without any form of identity documentation or proper registration via photography or fingerprinting.

Tadić et al. (2016) also contend that, despite the binding obligation of international and European law to provide refugees with appropriate aid, the EU abdicated its responsibility by leaving states to face the crisis on their own. It is estimated that, from September 2015 to March 2016, between 700 000 and 800 000 refugees and migrants used the Balkan route, with more than 650 000 refugees and migrants passed through Croatian territory (Giordan & Zrinščak, 2018; Mikac & Cesarec, 2017; Šelo Šabić & Borić, 2016). Despite such a constellation of relationships, all countries on the Balkan route were forced to cooperate, yet within this cooperation each nation ensured its own national interests first and foremost. The situation in Croatia at that time was very well captured by the then Minister of the Interior, Ranko Ostojić, who said that the priority was

to safeguard the smooth transit of migrants through Croatian territory [...] to secure free transit [...] and] to show that Croatia could take responsibility and that it had the capacity to assist the migrants with food, temporary shelter, and medical care. (Čepo et al., 2020, p. 475)

It is also worth noting that the vast majority of refugees and migrants wanted to reach Western Europe as soon as possible, while only a very small number of refugees applied for asylum in Croatia (Valenta et al., 2015).

Gaps between large numbers of migrants and refugees (there were days when more than 10 000 people a day entered the territory of each of the countries on the route), uncertainty of when the route would be opened for massive passage, limited transport and accommodation capacities throughout, limited humanitarian aid, security assumptions and altogether different approaches to handling the same challenge combined to result in political crisis among individual Balkan countries (Mikac & Cesarec, 2017, p. 169). Jakešević noted accordingly that the migration crisis

presented a serious test for the authorities of the Republic of Croatia, which were supposed to come up with a response that would not disrupt its relations with important European partners or lead to the politicization of this issue at the domestic political level, and also be considered legitimate by its citizens. (Jakešević, 2017, p. 185)

With the goal of caring for large quantities of individuals who entered its territory daily, Croatia organized several transit reception camps for migrants and refugees (Zorko, 2018). Also, it became clear over time that the main origin of migrants and refugees who crossed into Croatia was Serbia (Jakešević, 2017; Kešetović & Ninković, 2018; Mikac & Cesarec, 2017), which resulted in numerous open questions between the two countries. Many instances of misunderstanding took place, and though “they were aware that refugees and migrants did not want to stay in their countries [...] the Balkan route countries cooperated very badly, and some of them even confronted each other in some areas” (Mikac & Cesarec, 2017, p. 169). Additionally, as the crisis went on, “slowly the cooperation between countries increased, although by the end [...] this cooperation] had not reached a satisfactory level” (Mikac & Cesarec, 2017, p. 169). The event that brought the migrant crisis to a turning point was the signing of an agreement between the EU and Turkey in March of 2016, which asserted that all illegal migrants arriving to Greece via Turkey would be returned to Turkey (European Parliament, 2023). With this agreement the migratory crisis effectively abated, though numerous questions related to migration and asylum policy, and policies outlining coordination between the EU, member states, and third parties remained open.

### *Securitization of border management*

During the migration crisis of 2015-2016, most of these Balkan route countries, except for Germany and Austria, were only transit countries and not final destinations for most migrants and refugees. In the absence of management at the EU level and proper inter-state coordination, each country independently crafted its response to the crisis according to its specific needs and challenges. To provide a wider European context to the crisis, Jakešević and Tatalović (2016) divided all European countries into three categories. The first group consists of countries which “received and provided care for the people in need (mainly Germany, Austria, and Scandinavian countries)”. The second group consisted “mainly of those [countries] who were on the transit route [and] provided safe corridors through their territory (North Macedonia,

Serbia, and Croatia)”. And finally, the third group of countries were “those which, by building technical obstacles, employing military staff at their borders and changing their regulations and legislations, securitized this issue or were willing to securitize it (Slovenia, Hungary and the other three countries within the Visegrad group)” (Jakešević & Tatalović, 2016, p. 1254).

Tatalović and Malnar contend that the migration crisis of 2015-2016 not only “emphasized the weaknesses of European security”, but also that of “the political architecture and the non-functionality of European mechanisms” (Tatalović & Malnar, 2016, p. 286). They also argued that the first phase of the crisis “instigated numerous political controversies, public debates and partial solutions” throughout the entire EU sphere (Tatalović & Malnar, 2016, p. 286). Indeed, there have been numerous political and security questions left open among state actors because of the crisis. The main challenges of inter-state cooperation between neighboring countries were significantly accentuated at the beginning of the crisis. For example,

between Croatia and Serbia [these challenges] have led to the blockade and official closure of the main road border crossing for commercial freight traffic [...] while Hungary has retained the train composition of Croatian Railways that carried migrants and refugees from Croatia to Hungary. (Mikac & Cesarec, 2017, p. 180)

In the end, Hungary set up barbed wire along its entire border with Serbia and Croatia, while Slovenia did the same along the largest stretches of its border with Croatia. Moreover, many countries experienced a multitude of internal challenges due to the above crisis, with Croatia numbering among them. Croatia’s approach throughout the duration of the 2015-2016 migration crisis was humanitarian in nature, advocated by the then Social Democratic government. Croatia’s next migration approach, which promoted the securitization of the refugee crisis, “was advocated by the center-right and right-wing political parties, as well as by the Croatian President” (Jakešević & Tatalović, 2016, p. 1258).

During the entire migration crisis, from 2015 to 2016, the Croatian government did not militarize or securitize its approach, although this approach “was constantly under attack of the opposition parties supported by the President of the State Kolinda Grabar Kitarević, which claimed that Croatia was embarrassing itself in [a] situation which [could not] be handled without the involvement of the army” (Jakešević & Tatalović, 2016, p. 1259).

It is important to note that changes introduced to the Croatian legislature in March 2016 signified the “redefinition of the role of the armed forces [via] amendments to the Defense Act”, whereby “traditional tasks of the armed forces were complemented with additional tasks to be performed in close cooperation with police forces” (Jakešević, 2017, p. 189). Furthermore, these tasks requiring military-police coordination “now encompass the provision of support to the police in performing supervision and control of the border” (Jakešević, 2017, p. 189). These changes in legislation did not go in the direction of border militarization or border management, but instead opened up the possibility, if necessary, for the armed forces to provide support to the police in logistical matters. Therefore, this example is defined as first phase of *soft* militarization. The change in legislature is key argument of border militarization in Croatian case. As part of the Ministry of the Interior, the police in Croatia, like most other European countries, especially member states of the EU, are responsible for the

control and protection of the state border and all border-side operations but widening of military tasks related to border management is being a direct consequence of migrant securitization because of the 2015-2016 crisis.

After the end of the migrant crisis (March 2016), the Balkan migrant route was closed for the passage of larger groups of people, however, smaller groups and individuals continue to attempt illegal crossings to Western Europe every day. As noted by Dragović et al., in recent years attempts to truncate migratory flow to the EU have “focused on strengthening security policies and halting migrants’ arrival, but regardless of the measures taken, the Schengen area and freedom of movement have been endangered as never before” (Dragović et al., 2018, p. 261).

This endangerment is illustrated by the fact that some countries have “re-established border control at the internal borders of the EU, [and] at some borders physical barriers have been raised and further strengthening models have been considered” (Dragović et al., 2018, p. 261). This strengthening of security led to a tightening of state responses to issues of illegal border crossing particularly in relation to many official stances held before the migrant crisis. After the migrant crisis, “NGOs started to continuously report violence by the Croatian police and violent pushbacks of migrants and refugees, while the Croatian Prime Minister and the Croatian Minister of the Interior repeatedly denied allegations of violence from the Croatian police” (Roksandić et al., 2021).

There were reports on pushbacks that no official body took responsibility for. Such ad-hoc actions reported solely by NGO’s dealing with migrant issues and media present second phase of soft border militarization in Croatian case. The above issue invites a wide subject of debate over the legal balance between the humane protection of state borders and the enabling of refugees to exercise their own legitimate rights. To be considered in the above debate are two judgments made by the European Court of Human Rights (2021, 2023) which detailed how Croatian authorities, namely the police, did not utilize sufficient protective measures for either the lives of migrants and refugees or the remains of those who perished on Croatian soil in unresolved circumstances.

## Republic of Poland and *hard* border militarization

A nation shaped profoundly by World War Two and its resulting sphere of Soviet influence, Poland has aggressively sought to define and protect its own identity since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Two enormous steps for the country to distance itself from the ghost of its nationalized past were accession to the EU and membership to the NATO. Before either of those steps could be completed, massive economic, governmental, military, and social reforms were required for de-centralization and restructuring.

Like the experiences of other former Central European members of the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), the execution of these reforms posed many multi-faceted challenges but also served as the most direct path to leaving the shadow of the Soviet Union behind. Free elections in 1990, the establishment of the Central European Visegrad Group in 1991, and the signing of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland in 1997 were among the first tangible signals of the nation’s progression toward the parliamentary republic that it is today.

Together with the other members of the “Visegrad Four” (Hungary, Slovakia, and Czechia), Poland doggedly pursued and eventually achieved economic, social, and

strategic stability via EU membership and NATO integration (Center for Social and Economic Research, 2019). Roughly five years after joining NATO and ten years after its application for accession, Poland officially became a member of the EU with the other members of the Visegrad Group on May 1, 2004. Per 2021 economic data provided by the EU, the country had one of the lowest unemployment rates and government deficits in the EU (European Union, 2023). In terms of trade, 74% of Poland's exports go to other members of the EU while 67% of its imports come from the EU. The nation has yet to adopt the Euro as its official currency since much of the population has expressed apprehension to do so after the economic crisis of 2008, and as such the country still uses its own native currency (złoty).

As of January 2023, the population of Poland stood at 37.65 million people, ranking as the fifth largest country by population in the EU. The nation is ethnically homogenous to a high degree, with nearly 97% of its population reported as Polish, while the next largest ethnic group, Silesian, accounts for just over 1% of the population. According to data captured in 2011, 85% of the population has an affiliation with the Catholic religion, though more recent data indicates that nearly 13% of the population has no specified religious affiliation whatsoever.

However, per EU data, the country's purchasing power standard per inhabitant ranked as the ninth lowest among all member states, with 16.8% of its population "at risk of poverty or social exclusion" (Central Statistical Office, 2013). Poland ranks as the sixth largest EU member in terms of surface area (312 679 square kilometers) and stands as the largest member of the Visegrad Group. Along with eight other member states on the European landmass, the country serves as part of both the EU's and the Schengen area's easternmost border. The country joined the Schengen area on December 21, 2007, making 1 899 kilometers of its 3 582-kilometer border (53%) open to free transit within the EU. In addition to the EU member states of Czechia, Slovakia, Germany, and Lithuania, Poland shares a border with Ukraine (529 kilometers), Belarus (416 kilometers), and the Kaliningrad Oblast of Russia (210 kilometers), with an additional 528 kilometers of its border formed by the Baltic Sea. Thus, nearly one third (32%) of Poland's external border is shared with state actors who have some affiliation with the Russian Federation, whether directly (Kaliningrad Oblast), diplomatically (Belarus), or via conflict (Ukraine) (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], n. d.).

### *Regional dynamics: conflicts over migration and asylum policy*

Like the rest of the Visegrad Group over the last decade, Poland has adopted a strict stance toward immigration which has impacted not only its approach the greater subject of migration but also that of the entire EU. When beseeched for cooperation with the European Commission by sponsoring member states on the topics of asylum and distribution of refugees, members of the Visegrad Group have historically not responded in favor. This negative response has often inhibited key policies and even triggered "collective action failure" of the EU's governmental apparatus when trying to specifically address the issues of migration and asylum. Moreover, the collective refusal of the Visegrad Four to cooperate on migration and asylum policy at the EU level has inadvertently contributed to these issues being combined into security legislation such as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

Many scholars (Gruszczak, 2022; Grzeškowiak, 2022; Podgórzńska, 2019) and journalists (Higgins, 2022; Morris & Dixon, 2021; Reuters Staff, 2020) contend that the reasons behind Poland's reticence to cooperate with the European Commission on a more evenly distributed migration policy centers on the commonly held perception that migrants pose significant risks to the preservation of Polish identity and culture. Another possible reason for the nation's hesitation is the simple fact that the country does not have extensive experience in absorbing large numbers of immigrants from different cultures. Both above pieces of rationale could be attributed to the country's (lack of) reaction to the pan-European migration crisis of 2015-2016 when more than one million asylum seekers entered EU territory. In any case, Poland has actively resisted the notion of a legal obligation to host a "fair" proportion of refugees or asylees in exchange for funding from the EU budget, proposing instead to focus on the prevention of migrants' departure from origin countries via bilateral agreement. Essentially, Poland, like the rest of its Visegrad counterparts, has actively worked against refugee relocation via the principle of "mandatory solidarity" rather than via the already established Dublin Regulation within the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) whereby the responsibility for processing asylum requests falls on the first EU country of entry. This stance exists in direct conflict with countries like Italy and Spain, and Greece, who bare the brunt of migratory pressure toward the EU and seek to "spread the migration load" across all 27 EU member states.

Apart from the migration crisis of 2015-2016, Poland has responded to two geopolitical events involving migrants arriving from neighboring countries in very different ways. The first geopolitical event involves its neighbor on the northern side of its eastern border, Belarus. In response to a totalitarian crackdown on dissent of a suspected fraudulent presidential election in 2020, Belarus became the target of a series of sanctions by the EU and United States. The person whose presidency was brought into question, Alexander Lukashenko, took retaliatory measures beginning in the middle of 2021, when he suspended a bilateral agreement which required Belarus to accept the return of migrants who had transited Belarus to reach the EU.

After this measure, media reports from August of 2021 started to indicate that the Belarusian government entities encouraged and facilitated the travel of migrants from Middle Eastern and African countries to the EU (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). Culminating in the middle of November of 2021, the 416-kilometer Poland-Belarus border became the site of an international crisis involving thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries. In addition to Lithuania and Latvia, Poland responded to this crisis by declaring a state of emergency and ramping up security measures at the border to prevent illegal border crossings and facilitate a blanket "pushback" policy. These security measures involved the erection of barbed wire fences and permanent border walls in addition to the deployment of military personnel to augment normal border patrol forces. That is the first reason why in the case of Poland border militarization could be named hard since it includes physical obstacles and deployment of military forces.

At the beginning of 2022, the Polish Border Guard reported that nearly 40 000 "attempts of illegal border crossings" were recorded throughout the entirety of 2021, up from only 129 attempts in 2020. By contrast, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, or Frontex, reports that "only" 8 184 illegal border crossings were detected in 2021 across the "Eastern Borders Route", which includes not only Poland's border but also those of Latvia and Lithuania. The disparity in the figures reported by each entity may

be rooted in the fact that Poland rejected Frontex assistance, thus denying the EU agency the opportunity to include Polish data in its reports. Poland's preclusion of Frontex involvement further reinforces the perception that its government considers migration policy and response to be the responsibility of national governments. Additionally, the country's prevention of EU involvement drew international criticism and theories that Poland was deliberately avoiding oversight of its response to the humanitarian crisis (Congressional Research Service, 2021). As the situation stands now, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania have all constructed permanent border walls in anticipation of renewed irregular migration flows across the Belarusian border. Such process of ignoring EU attempts for help is the second reason why in this case study one could define Poland border management as an example of hard border militarization.

The other major geopolitical event involving the Polish border centered first on Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, then its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. During this period, the Polish government has fluctuated in its stance to supporting Ukrainian refugees, though its response has been much more favorable to this crisis than the Belarusian crisis. In fact, Poland leads the entire EU in terms of both refugees accepted and monetary aid provided to Ukrainians at the time of this writing. As of late 2022, nearly 1.5 million Ukrainians have found refuge within Poland while 7.6 million people have crossed the border since the beginning of Russia's invasion in February 2022. This widespread acceptance of Ukrainian migrants has been primarily facilitated by individual volunteers and communities rather than by the Polish government, with the Polish Economic Institute reporting that 77% of Poles have assisted fleeing Ukrainians in some way. Despite this initial generosity, signs of economic strain have begun to taper the Polish public's attitude toward refugees as the country has spent over \$8 billion to provide housing and health services for Ukrainians (Jaroszewicz & Grzymski, 2021).

The differences in governmental and public response to these two migration crises are stark and originate from two factors. The factor involves a general Polish desire to protect the Polish culture and identity from outside influence. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who come from different cultures, practice different religions, and look different from typical Poles are thus seen as a direct threat to Polish culture and identity. The irregular migration flow across the Belarusian border consisted primarily of this type of migrant, while the flow across the Ukrainian border did not. The second factor which differentiated Poland's response to these two migration crises hinges on the cause of these crises. The Belarusian migration crisis is perceived to be manufactured by the Belarusian government with would-be migrants who came from foreign lands for foreign reasons. By contrast, the Ukrainian migration crisis is perceived to be directly caused by Russian aggression, something with which the Polish people empathize deeply. Moreover, Ukraine is viewed by Poland (and most of the EU) as the first line of defense against Russian aggression and is therefore seen to be worth supporting in any way possible. Thus, the Belarusian migration crisis triggered a strong "pushback" response from both the Polish public and government while the Ukrainian migration crisis did not. Similar situation has happened in Croatia as well. Despite its geographical distance Croatia was highly involved in Ukrainian crisis with positive measures for Ukrainian migrants.

### *Polish reaction to the 2015-2016 migration crisis*

With the context of the two most recent migration crises to affect Poland in mind, it is worthwhile to consider the nation's reaction to the pan-EU migration crisis in 2015-2016. On the receiving end of heavy criticism from sources both within and outside of the EU, Poland's reaction to this crisis has been called xenophobic and at odds with numerous EU proposals. Since 2011, Poland's stance within the European Council was to set the priority on fostering better conditions in origin countries located in the "Southern Neighborhood" rather than taking part in the relocation of migrants and refugees. By advocating for the improvement of democratic, security, and economic conditions in Northern African and Middle Eastern countries, Poland sought to eliminate the root causes of involuntary migration and thus circumvent the discussion of strategies for developing the CEAS.

However, once the severity of the 2015 crisis showed how migration prevention efforts were effectively irrelevant, Polish authorities shifted focus to championing the "eastern dimension" of the CSDP rather than engage in discussions on a common asylee relocation system. This resulted in sharp criticism from the European Commission and other member states which decried Poland's failure to show solidarity. Furthermore, this controversy was seized upon politically by the opposition party and forced the incumbent Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz, to clarify the difference Poland would make between economic migrants and refugees. Thus, going forward, the Prime Minister placed a precondition on solidarity with other joint EU migration solutions to separate economic migrants from refugees. Even after drawing this line of participation, Ewa Kopacz was heavily criticized by her political opposition who cast her behavior as placing the well-being of foreigners over her constituents. Out of this political event came the decree in September 2015 that Poland would only accept refugees of a "specified identity posing no threat to state security or public order", with a cap being placed on Poland's participation in the relocation scheme (Potyrała, 2016).

The ensuing change of governmental regime further altered Poland's approach to participation in the EU's refugee relocation scheme. This change marked a sharp shift to the right where the new government placed added emphasis on putting the security of member states and EU citizens before considering the protection of foreigners requiring legitimate protection. The terrorist attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) were also leveraged by the Polish government to further their agenda of aggressively rolling back support for the European Commission's refugee relocation scheme. This series of events illustrates a textbook case of Polish officials securitizing the relocation of refugees by making the issue more about the security of Polish citizens than about the human rights of migrants. A long saga of anti-Islamist policies proposed by conservative political parties followed. Though these policies failed to distinguish between the concept of migrants and refugees by "lumping together" migratory flows and terrorist threats, many proposals garnered substantial public support via referendum. Unfortunately, much of the same rhetoric which conflates economic immigration and terrorism with providing asylum to those who qualify for it is still being used today.

The actual irregular migration flows faced by Poland between 2015 and 2016 were minimal, with most of the land-based flow occurring over the Western Balkan Route which runs well south of the country. While Hungary faced unprecedented volumes of

irregular migrants in 2015, the only real migration pressure faced by Poland occurred via the voluntary “import” of refugees to predetermined locations in the country. This notion is confirmed by Frontex data which reports that a total of 3 304 illegal border crossings were detected across the entire Eastern Borders Route from the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2016, compared to nearly 900 000 across the Western Balkan Route during that same period.

### *Militarization of the Polish border*

Since the 2015-2016 migration crisis, Poland has decidedly securitized its response to forced migration and immigration issues both through border and immigration control. This securitization can be observed in the diversion of most governmental discussions about migration toward border security and away from the care of refugees. The rationale behind such measures stems from fear of terrorism, fear of economic opportunity loss, and a general desire to protect Polish culture which generates xenophobic beliefs.

In response to the 2021 crisis generated by Belarus, Poland took its securitized approach (Caballero Vélez & Krapivnitskaya, 2020), even further on its eastern border. Declaring a state of emergency, the Polish government deployed over 10 000 soldiers to augment border security forces after many thousands of attempted crossings were recorded. While Poland’s response to the crisis was criticized for its staunch “pushback” nature, it can also be said that the Belarusian government weaponized the flow of migration as a form of hybrid aggression. Numerous travel companies within Belarus were said to have lured migrants from Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries via social media by promising entry to the EU. Then, possibly with state support, these travel companies supplied the migrants with travel visas and one-way airline tickets to Belarus, where state authorities facilitated their transport to the border with Poland. This situation resulted in an estimated 4 000 migrants being gathered near the Bruzgi-Kuznica border crossing area with over a dozen fatalities due to harsh winter conditions and a lack of adequate facilities or supplies. These arguments were corroborated in EU official reports, International Organization for Migration (IOM) official reports and throughout the media reports.

Exposed to deliberate migratory pressure designed to drain state resources and cause disruptions to daily life, Poland thus became caught in a “tit for tat” exchange between Belarus and the greater EU apparatus (Bejan & Nabi, 2021). This exposure generated a perception of being under attack and resulted in discussions about triggering Article Four of the NATO, signifying a willingness to escalate the conflict by involving the international defense organization. Some observers have commented that, via the migration crisis it generated, Belarus achieved its objective of destabilization by sowing discord among EU member states and pulling on the already loose string of EU policy toward immigration and external affairs.

Interestingly, the Belarusian government quickly reduced the migratory pressure it had facilitated after images of Polish security forces interacting with migrants in riot gear flooded international news media outlets. This perhaps indicates that the Belarusian regime sought to cast the EU (and Poland in particular) in a bad light, invite critical scrutiny of both parties, and ultimately create material for anti-EU propaganda.

Playing into the same narrative, the Polish government continuously prioritized security over the well-being of the migrants who were collected and detained in an exclusion zone within its borders.

Poland's strict pushback policy combined with its rejection of assistance from the EU and humanitarian organizations to handle the migrant population highlighted its willingness to disregard EU and international law pertaining to the human rights of refugees. This disregard mostly stems from a militarized approach to migration, in which migrants were seen and treated as threats to sovereignty and security sent by a foreign state aggressor. Essentially, Poland rationalized its militarized migration approach and subsequent disregard of applicable asylum laws as justified response to being *under attack*.

## Conclusion(s)

This paper showed the forms in which border militarization persists in the contemporary world. Along with *classical border militarization* that presumes military presence along borders of sovereign states, most commonly during crisis, there are other levels (or types) of border militarization that could be found in European context after Migrant crisis 2015-2016. In an effort to comprehensively define border militarization, the authors suggest the addition of *third-party militarization*, *technical militarization*, *ad hoc militarization*, and *provoked militarization* to the basic definition. Practical examples for all types were given, while two of them were used for case studies and further elaborated in detail.

The cases of Croatia and Poland were chosen due to similar outcomes after migration crisis—the usage of alternative types of border militarization. The case of Croatia illustrates the *ad-hoc border militarization* response to a migration crisis. In the wake of the 2015-2016 crisis, numerous weak points of the EU were revealed. Additionally, weaknesses of individual countries (including Croatia) emerged in their responses to the issue of refugees, migration policy, border management and cooperation between different actors. As this is a recent event that has not yet been sufficiently analyzed among different disciplines, this issue requires further discussion because the unstable situation in Europe and its “Neighborhoods” can easily lead to renewed mass migration and refugee crises. Should such crises occur, the best tool for proper response is the recognition and application of lessons learned from previous crises. Considering all the known circumstances and facts so far, we can argue that Croatia did not militarize its border protection during 2015-2016 migration crisis, but ad hoc militarization and *soft* militarization took place in the form of publicly unexplained activities during push-backs.

The case of Poland illustrates the *provoked border militarization* response to mass migration crises. Though seeking to reinvent itself as a democratized, Western nation with a market economy, Poland continues to wrestle with the concept of immigration management. Like other members of the Visegrad Four, Poland views migrants who display traits of “otherness” both physically and culturally not only as threats to Polish culture and identity but also to Polish security. As witnessed on the border with Belarus, when flows of such migrants are facilitated by foreign actors, the Polish government views this facilitation as a hybrid attack which justifies a *hard*

militarized response. However, when migrants hail from familiar cultural origins and share a cause that generates national empathy (such as refugees from Ukraine), the response of the government and public is drastically different. A common theme among Poland's response to each event is the priority it places on security, be it from unwanted migration or from Russian aggression.

The two selected cases prove that subtle forms of militarization along the border of sovereign states are common in Europe and can exist in the rest of the world. Along with different types of presence, the militarization of borders becomes a visible trend in the international community. The European border system (Schengen zone) seems to be the first one to be abandoned in the time of crisis, leaving the concept of free movement in the EU heavily challenged. Both the migration crises and the COVID-19 crisis closed internal borders between member states, questioning the very core of European idea—the free movement of ideas, goods, and people on commonly defined territory—therefore a Schengen paradox is process that occurred in a sense of closure of internal borders and free flow through the so-called *Schengen wall*, the outer border of integrated space.

Nonetheless, the trend of border militarization is present in Europe as well as in the other parts of the world. Democratic states are not immune to military border enforcement when considered necessary, which may lead toward military (over)use of power toward migrants and the continuous securitization of migration issues. Bearing in mind the fact that the 21st Century is and will be the century of migrations (people on the move not only for classical reasons but new challenges such as climate issues), this militarization leads toward the multiplication of conflict rather than inclusion. The nuances of border militarization will intensify as technical possibilities develop and geopolitical circumstances change, but the trend itself is not oriented toward problem-solving in the migration related environment but rather toward the generation of problems in international security environment. Although this paper contains regionally specific findings it would be beneficial to test them in global environment in the future.

## References

- Andreychuk, R. (2018, September 21). *Security in the Western Balkans (178 PCNP 18 E rev. 1 fin)*. NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2018-security-western-balkans-andreychuck-report-178-pcnp-18-e-rev1-fin>
- Bejan, R. & Nabi, S. (2021, December 1). *The EU is the real villain in the Poland-Belarus migrant crisis*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/the-eu-is-the-real-villain-in-the-poland-belarus-migrant-crisis-172132>
- Bourbeau, P. (2011). *The securitization of migration: a study of movement and order*. Routledge.
- Caballero Vélez, D. & Krapivnitskaya, E. (2020). The EU migration policy securitization process: from a domestic to a foreign dimension. *Public Policy Studies*, 7(4(28)), 105-122. <https://doi.org/10.33119/KSzPP/2020.4.6>
- Casas-Cortés, M., Cobarrubias, S. & Pickles, J. (2012). Re-bordering the neighbourhood: Europe's emerging geographies of non-accession integration. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 20(1), 37-58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776411434848>

- Center for Social and Economic Research. (2019). *Our Europe: 15 years of Poland in the European Union*. [http://www.case-research.eu/files/?id\\_plik=6336](http://www.case-research.eu/files/?id_plik=6336)
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). (n. d.). *Poland Country Summary*. The World Factbook. Retrieved January 4, 2023 from <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/poland/summaries>
- Central Statistical Office. (2013, August 7). *Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 2013*. <https://stat.gov.pl/en/topics/statistical-yearbooks/statistical-yearbooks/concise-statistical-yearbook-of-poland-2013,1,14.html>
- Čepo, D., Čehulić, M. & Zrinščak, S. (2020). What a difference does time make? framing media discourse on refugees and migrants in Croatia in two periods. *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration*, 20(3), 469-496. <https://doi.org/10.31297/hkju.20.3.3>
- Congressional Research Service. (2021). *Migrant crisis on the Belarus-Poland border*. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11983>
- Croatian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Popis 2021*. <https://dzs.gov.hr/naslovna-blokovi/u-fokusu/popis-2021/88>
- Croatian Parliament. (2017). National security strategy of the Republic of Croatia. *Official Gazette*, (73/2017). <https://www.soa.hr/files/file/National-Security-Strategy-2017.pdf>
- Dragović, F., Hasanović, A., Mikac, R. & Mamić, K. (2018). Novi pristupi izazovu masovnih migracija. *Forum for Security Studies*, 2(2), 247-268. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/308720>
- Dumbrava, C. (2021, July). *Artificial intelligence at EU borders. Overview of applications and key issues*. European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS\\_IDA\(2021\)690706\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/690706/EPRS_IDA(2021)690706_EN.pdf)
- Dumbrava, C. (2022, October). *Walls and fences at EU borders*. European Parliament Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733692/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)733692\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733692/EPRS_BRI(2022)733692_EN.pdf)
- Džidić, G. (2020). Sekuritizacija iregularnih migracija u kampanji za predsjedničke izbore u Republici Hrvatskoj 2019/2020. *Suvremene teme*, 11(1), 27-50. <https://doi.org/10.46917/st.11.1.2>
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021a, November 9). What is happening on the Poland-Belarus border? The Economist explains. *The Economist*. [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A713713340/AONE?u=mlyn\\_b\\_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=1152e97](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A713713340/AONE?u=mlyn_b_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=1152e97)
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021b, November 13). Caught at the wire; the Belarus-Poland border. *The Economist*. [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A682029298/AONE?u=mlyn\\_b\\_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=a5b5075e](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A682029298/AONE?u=mlyn_b_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=a5b5075e)
- The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021c, November 19). Poland-Belarus border crisis: what next? *Country Report: Poland*. [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A684326266/AONE?u=mlyn\\_b\\_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=93194e27](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A684326266/AONE?u=mlyn_b_bumml&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=93194e27)
- Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, M. (2021). Re-bordering Europe? Collective action barriers to 'Fortress Europe'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(3), 447-467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1881585>

- European Commission. (2016, April 6). *Smart borders package: questions & answers*. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pt/MEMO\\_16\\_1249](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/pt/MEMO_16_1249)
- European Commission. (2021, October 19). *2021 Enlargement package: European Commission assesses and sets out reform priorities for the Western Balkans and Turkey*. [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2021-enlargement-package-european-commission-assesses-and-sets-out-reform-priorities-western-balkans-2021-10-19\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/2021-enlargement-package-european-commission-assesses-and-sets-out-reform-priorities-western-balkans-2021-10-19_en)
- European Court of Human Rights. (2021). *Multiple violations concerning an Afghan family whose daughter died at the Croatian border*. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-7183946-9752781>
- European Court of Human Rights. (2023). *Case of Daraibou v. Croatia*. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-222311>
- European External Action Service. (2022). *Western Balkans*. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/western-balkans\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/western-balkans_en)
- European Parliament. (2023, August 8). *The EU response to migrant and asylum*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78629/the-eu-response-to-migration-and-asylum>
- European Union. (n. d.). *European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)*. [https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/frontex\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/frontex_en)
- European Union. (2023, January 4). *Poland (Country profile)*. [https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles/poland\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/country-profiles/poland_en)
- Fausser, M. (2006). *Transnational migration-A national security risk? Securitization of migration policies in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom (Report & Analysis, 2/06)*. Center for International Relations. [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004804/01/rap\\_i\\_an\\_0206a.pdf](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004804/01/rap_i_an_0206a.pdf)
- Ferreira, M. J. M. (2018). Memory, trauma and the securitization of migration in contemporary Hungary. *Political Observer. Revista Portuguesa de Ciência Política*, (9), 45-69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768617745481>
- Giordan, G. & Zrinščak, S. (2018). One pope, two churches: refugees, human rights and religion in Croatia and Italy. *Social Compass*, 65(1), 62-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768617745481>
- Gruszczak, A. (2022). The problem of otherness: Poland's immigration policy and the virtues of parochialism. *Studia Europejskie-Studies in European Affairs*, 26(2), 107-122. <https://doi.org/10.33067/SE.2.2022.7>
- Grzeškowiak, M. (2022). The “Guardian of the Treaties” is no more? the European Commission and the 2021 humanitarian crisis on Poland–Belarus border. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 42(1), 81-102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdac025>
- Higgins, A. (2022, November 15). In Poland, a warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees Wobbles. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/15/world/europe/poland-ukrainian-war-refugees.html>
- Jakešević, R. (2017). Migration and security policy of the Republic of Croatia. In M. Bobić & S. Janković (Eds.), *Towards understanding of contemporary migration. Causes, consequences, policies, reflections* (pp. 177-196). Faculty of Philosophy-University of Belgrade. <https://isi.f.bg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Towards-Understanding-of-Contemporary-Migration.pdf>

- Jakešević, R. & Tatalović, S. (2016). Securitization (and de-securitization) of the European refugee crisis: Croatia in the regional context. *Teorija in Praksa*, 53(5), 1246-1264. [https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/default-source/tip/jakesevic\\_idr.pdf?sfvrsn=2](https://www.fdv.uni-lj.si/docs/default-source/tip/jakesevic_idr.pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- Jaroszewicz, M. & Grzymalski, J. (2021). Technocracy revisited: the Polish security dispositif and Ukrainian migration to Poland. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 17(2), 258-280. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v17i2.1215>
- Jones, R. & Ferdoush, Md. A. (2018). Introduction. The global transformation of borders and mobility. In R. Jones & Md. A. Ferdoush (Eds.), *Borders and mobility in South Asia and beyond* (pp. 11-28). Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv513ckq.4>
- Kačić, H. (1998). Affirmation of statehood and territorial integrity of Croatia. *Croatian International Relations Review*, 4(12/13), 146-154. <https://cirrj.org/article-detail/?id=157>
- Kešetović, Ž. & Ninković, V. (2018). Migrants, local fundamentalists and returnees along the Western Balkans route. *Annals of Disaster Risk Sciences*, 1(1), 19-26. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/295212>
- Marcu, S. (2015). Between (re)bordering and networked border: cross-border mobility practices of eastern European immigrants in Spain. *Boletín de la Asociación Española de Geografía*, (69), 211-232. <https://bage.age-geografia.es/ojs/index.php/bage/article/view/1910>
- Mattis, J. & Krsticevic, D. (2017, July 12). *Remarks by Secretary Mattis in an Honor Cordon Welcoming Croatian Defense Minister Damir Krsticevic to the Pentagon* [Speech transcript]. U. S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/1245735/remarks-by-secretary-mattis-in-an-honor-cordon-welcoming-croatian-defense-minis/>
- Mikac, R. & Cesarec, I. (2017). The Balkans and refugee crisis: lessons identified and way forward [Special issue]. *Security dialogue*, 8, 169-188. <https://doi.org/10.47054/SD171-20169m>
- Morris, L. & Dixon, R. (2021, November 8). 'They will not come in': mounting standoff over migrants on Poland and Belarus border. *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-poland-migrants-border/2021/11/08/dd35948a-4072-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belarus-poland-migrants-border/2021/11/08/dd35948a-4072-11ec-9404-50a28a88b9cd_story.html)
- Podgórzanska, R. (2019). The issue of securitization of the refugee: problem in the Polish political debate. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 48(1), 67-89. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2019104>
- Potyrała, A. (2016). Poland towards the migration crisis of 2015-2016. *Przegląd Politologiczny*, (2), 75-87. <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2016.21.2.6>
- Reuters Staff. (2020, September 24). *Visegrad four grouping push back on new EU migration plan*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-idUSKCN26F1T6>
- Roksandić, S., Mamić, K. & Mikac, R. (2021). Migration in the time of COVID-19—policy responses and practices in Croatia concerning the Western Balkan routes and readiness for the post-COVID-19 society in which the right to health care for the most vulnerable is guaranteed. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 3, Article 595189. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2021.595189>

- Šelo Šabić, S. & Borić, S. (2016). *At the gate of Europe. A report on refugees on the Western Balkan route*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. [https://www.irmo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/At-the-Gate-of-Europe\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.irmo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/At-the-Gate-of-Europe_WEB.pdf)
- Tadić, J., Dragović, F. & Tadić, T. (2016). Migracijska i izbjeglička kriza–sigurnosni rizici za EU. *Policija i sigurnost*, 25(1), 14-41. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/236938>
- Tatalović, S. & Malnar, D. (2016). Migration and refugee crisis in Europe: states on the Balkan route between securitisation and humanitarianism. *International problems*, 68(4), 285-308. <https://doi.org/10.2298/MEDJP1604285T>
- Terry, K. (2021, April 8). *The EU-Turkey deal, five years on: a frayed and controversial but enduring blueprint*. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/eu-turkey-deal-five-years-on>
- Valenta, M., Zuparic-Iljic, D. & Vidovic, T. (2015). The reluctant asylum-seekers: migrants at the southeastern frontiers of the European Migration System. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 34(3), 95-113. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdv009>
- Večernji list. (2019, November 12). *Kontroverzna Štajerska straža patrolira s puškama uz hrvatsku granicu*. <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/stajerska-straža-patrolira-s-puskama-uz-hrvatsku-granicu-1358861>
- Zorko, M. (2018). Hardening regional borders. Change in mobility from South Asia to the European Union. In R. Jones & Md. A. Ferdoush (Eds.), *Borders and mobility in South Asia and beyond* (pp. 187-206). Amsterdam University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv513ckq.12>

Marta Zorko

Croatian. PhD in International Relations and National Security at Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb. She is assistant professor at the same faculty teaching political geography and geopolitics. She also teaches at the Croatian Military Academy. Research lines: geopolitics, border studies, security studies. Recent publication: Zorko, M. & Lučev, J. (2021). Geographical patterns and geo-economic reasoning of pandemic consequences: old geopolitical “games” in post-COVID global order, *Sociologija i prostor*, 59(219), 89-118. <https://doi.org/10.5673/sip.59.0.4>

Robert Mikac

Croatian. PhD in International Relations and National Security at Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb. Assistant professor at the same faculty teaching crisis management. He also teaches at the Croatian Military Academy. Research lines: security studies, specifically in strategic management, small arms and light weapons, crisis management and recovery, migration, and civil and critical infrastructure protection. Recent publication: Mikac, R. (2022). Determination and development of definitions and concepts of hybrid threats and hybrid wars: comparison of solutions at the level of the European Union, NATO and Croatia. *Politics in Central Europe*, 18(3), 355-374. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2022-0016>

Rory Yoder

American. Master in Political Science from the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb. He is us Coast Guard Pilot and Aeronautical Engineering Officer currently serving as an Olmsted Scholar in Zagreb, Croatia. Research lines: irregular migration in both the EU and USA. His continued studies center on a comparative analysis of Frontex and the US Coast Guard in their responses to irregular maritime migration. Recent publication: Yoder, R. (2022). *Iregularne migracije pomorskim rutama prema eu i SAD-u: Različita rješenja za slične izazove?* [Master thesis, Sveučilište u Zagrebu]. FPZG repozitorij. <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:114:399131>