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FRONTEX and Migration in the Aegean Sea

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Declaration

I, Undraa Bayanaa, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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Undraa Bayanaa

Abstract

Human migration is one of the most pressing issues in contemporary politics. Massive unrest due to the unravelling of regimes in the Middle East, as well as the rise of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the world, have caused large-scale displacements worldwide. To find safety and a better life for themselves and their families, many refugees and migrants are risking their lives by undertaking dangerous sea crossings. This phenomenon is especially evident in countries such as Italy and Greece, the countries on the frontline of Europe's migration routes.

In response to the challenges of migration, European politicians have opted for a prevailing emergency frame. Thus, emphasizing the need for protecting the borders of the EU through the enforcement of the common external borders. In 2016, the new European Border and Coast Guard has been created and the mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been significantly expanded, thus making it the main 'tool' for stemming the flows of migrants and protecting the external borders of the EU. This research seeks to analyze the 'securitizing' links between migration, security, border control, and Frontex.

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List of Acronyms

BCP	Border-crossing point
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CS	Copenhagen School
EBCG	European Border and Coast Guard
EU	European Union
EUROPOL	European police office
EUROSUR	European Border Surveillance System
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency (former European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union)
IBM	Integrated Border Management
ICC	International Coordination Centre
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMRF	International Maritime Rescue Federation
JO	Joint Operation
MOAS	Migrant Offshore Aid Station
MRCC	Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre
MS	Member State of the EU
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PS	Paris School
SAR	Search and rescue
SOLAS	International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

“There is much about Europe’s borders that is disturbing and horrific. But these borders also contain other stories: of the tenacity, resilience and desire of the migrants who cross these borders” (Carr, 2012, p. 7)

Chapter 1. Introduction

Human migration is one of the most pressing issues in contemporary politics. Massive unrest due to the unravelling of regimes in the Middle East, as well as the rise of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the world, have caused large-scale displacements worldwide. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over one million people fled to Europe because of war, persecution and poverty in 2015 alone. Furthermore, the number of forcibly displaced people is still rising.

In an attempt to find safety and a better life for themselves and their families, many refugees and migrants are risking their lives by undertaking dangerous sea crossings in overcrowded and unsuitable seafaring vessels (Carr, 2015; IOM, 2015). This phenomenon is especially evident in Italy and Greece, the countries on the frontline of Europe's migration routes.

In addition to the extremely dangerous route via the Mediterranean Sea, several new border-crossing points (BCP) have emerged, for instance across the Aegean Sea. The maritime border between Turkey and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea have been under migratory pressure for many years, however in 2015 the arrivals and deaths have significantly increased (IOM, 2015). Despite the high risks that these maritime routes entail, humans keep migrating. As Jelena von Helldorff (2015) shows, "their fierce persistence, determination and conviction that the future will be better once they reach the European borders reflect the degree of despair and precariousness of life in their own countries" (p. 1).

Despite the current increasing focus on migration, it is by no means a new phenomenon. However, due to its extreme politicization, migration and human mobility constitute an overarching theme that dominates European politics, policy and legislative agendas, as well as public and academic discussions (Eleftheria-Papi, 2015). More specifically, management and control of migration creates deep divisions between the Member States of the European Union (EU) (von Helldorff, 2015). Indeed, considering the rapid development of the latest waves of migration to Europe, and the high number of lives lost at sea, the EU Member

States are struggling to find a common and effective response to tackle the issue (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2012).

With regional integration and supranational institutions, European countries hailed the advent of a new borderless Europe where goods, services, capital and people can move freely (Carr, 2015). However, due to the emergence of large-scale movements of people (i.e. asylum-seekers, undocumented migrants and economic migrants) into the European Union (EU), the integrity of the Schengen zone has been brought into question and casts doubts on Europe's self-proclaimed and often repeated commitment to human rights, rule of law and solidarity (Carr, 2015). Paradoxically, in response to the increasing migratory movements between 2015 and 2016, many Western societies (i.e. France, Austria, Hungary...) have reinforced their borders for 'security' reasons (Alderman and Kanter, 2016).

This reinforcement of borders as well as temporary reintroduction of border controls in some EU member states (European Commission, 2017) is to some extent also related to the images and rhetoric used in the media and in public debates. Indeed, in many Western societies migrants and refugees were quickly perceived as a burden for welfare systems and have also been portrayed as criminals and, at times, terrorists (Carr, 2015). As such, migrants and refugees are also associated with numerous social problems and often have narratives termed *crisis*, *threat* and *invasion* surrounding them (Leonard, 2010; Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2012; Karyotis, 2012).

The result is among others the rise of xenophobia and extreme right-wing parties in many European countries, which are using the situation to spread anxieties, hostility, and fears among the local population and at elite levels (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). In addition, such rhetoric also enhances popular support in favor of stricter control of the external borders of the EU. Thus also emphasizing the need for a stricter management of population movements in order to filter 'desirable' and 'undesirable' migrants before they even reach Europe (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002).

In response to the current migratory pressures, policymakers in Europe have put greater emphasis on preventing undocumented migration into Europe and have reinforced the security prerogatives at their borders. Undoubtedly, the current migration to, and asylum ambitions within, Europe is perceived as being a 'crisis' that threatens the security of the entire Union.

Considering the EU's migration and refugee 'crisis', current strategies and legislation established by the EU highlight the importance of protecting Europe and its borders and emphasize the importance of restricting migratory flows and combatting people smuggling. In this regard, systematically externalizing borders and outsourcing migration controls into the Sea has become part of the European response to undocumented migration and human smuggling (Leonard, 2010).

For instance, Carr (2015) indicates that today, more than ever, the borders of the EU are reinforced with "police, soldiers, border guards, naval patrols, physical barriers and detection technologies in the most sustained and extensive border enforcement programme in history" (p. 3). Andersson (2016) reinforces this sentiment by indicating that many EU countries have generated and deployed massive technologies and tools to counter undocumented migration under a prevailing emergency frame. The implementation of such tools is both punitive and counterproductive (Carr, 2015; Andersson, 2016).

Despite the various means of deterrence (i.e. closure of migration routes across Europe, hardening of physical and bureaucratic barriers and construction of barbed wire fences) and the efforts to contain, control and combat undocumented migration, the current situation has only become more tragic (Andersson, 2016). The mass investments in border security and control cannot deter migrants willing to risk their lives to find access to Europe (Andersson, 2016; Carr, 2015). In contrary, due to the lack of alternatives and the absence of legal pathways, migrants are pushed to take greater risks by hiring smugglers (Von Helldorff, 2015).

In this context, studying the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex (also referred as the Agency) is essential. Frontex is one of the central agencies employed by the EU in border crossing points. Since 2016, the Agency's mandate has expanded and its activities, capacities and resources have significantly increased in response to the migratory challenges at the external borders of the EU. This study aims to focus on three aspects related to the deployment of Frontex. Namely, integrated border management (IBM), search and rescue (SAR) at sea, and human rights.

1.1. Problem statement

Traditionally, scholars of IR have focused on topics related to states, security, international diplomacy, peace and war. Thus, issues that directly affect the survival of the State and which can jeopardize national and international security if it is not tackled appropriately (Mitchell, 1989).

Considering the growing importance of migration today and in the coming years, investigating this topic through an International Relations (IR) theory lens is not only needed but it is also relevant. In the wake of the emergence of mass displacements worldwide, migration has become highly intertwined with international politics. Indeed, international migration poses many regulatory challenges to the countries of origin, transit, and arrival (Le Gloannec, 2016).

In Europe, the ongoing migration and refugee ‘crisis’ has laid bare the gaps in the current responses of the EU. In fact, increasing xenophobia, overburdened decision making system, lack of long term strategy and lack of solidarity have hindered an effective response to the issue (Le Gloannec, 2016).

Under the prevailing emergency frame, the flows of migrants and refugees were more and more associated with *crisis* and *threat* rhetoric. The latter has enabled the European governments to present migration as a security problem that needs to be tackled with extraordinary measures and tools.

The EU migration policy and the securitizing practices and tools employed by the EU to control and regulate migration are little studied and out of the public’s eye. Therefore, the central focus of this research is to explore and understand the nexus between migration, security and border control in the European context. More specifically, this study focuses on the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex.

Even though, Frontex faces a growing demand in today’s Europe considering migratory pressures, little research has yet focused on the Agency’s contribution to the EU’s objectives of stemming the flows of migrants and ensuring the security of the external borders. It is critical to understand the EU’s growing border regime by analyzing the evolution of Frontex. In addition, the role of Frontex in securing the borders of the EU, tackling irregular migration via the sea and fighting human smuggling.

1.2. Research questions

Considering the above mentioned, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: *How does the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) operate in the Aegean Sea?*

RQ2: *How does Frontex contribute to the effective management of migration and ensure the security of the external borders of the EU?*

1.3. Concepts

This sub-section briefly defines some of the concepts relevant in research.

External borders: refers to the Schengen area's outer/ external borders. Up until now, the EU frontline member states (i.e. Greece, Italy, Spain, Malta) were responsible for the management of these borders. However, the growing arrival of migrants and refugees has put increasing burden on these countries. Thus, today with the request of a Member State, Frontex can assist to the control of the external borders. Moreover, external borders also refer to the "land borders, including river and lake borders, sea borders and their airports, river ports, sea ports and lake ports, provided that they are not internal borders" (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 2).

Internal borders: refers to "the common land borders, including river and lake borders, of the Member States; the airports of the Member States for internal flights; sea, river and lake ports of the Member States for regular internal ferry connections" (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 1). It should be noted that there are no border checks at the internal borders.

Border crossing point: refers to "any crossing-point authorized by the competent authorities for the crossing of external borders" (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 8).

EU frontline states: refers to Spain, Italy, Malta and Greece.

Border guard: refers to "any public official assigned, in accordance with national law, to a border crossing point or along the border (...) who carries out, (...) border control tasks" (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 14).

Border control: Border control consists of measures “related to the prevention and detection of cross-border crime, such as migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and terrorism, and measures related to the referral of persons who are in need of, or wish to apply for, international protection” (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, Chapter 1, art. 4).

Integrated Border Management (IBM): the EU has developed an IBM strategy which includes various tasks such as border control, SAR operations at sea and risk analysis in order to maintain high levels of security along the external borders of the EU (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, Preamble, art. 4)

Migration: the term *migration* used throughout refers to a mixed group of people and embraces both people who qualify for refugee status (those granted protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention) and those who have left their country of origin with the attempt to find a better place for themselves and their families. The reasons which have pushed them to leave their country is different from person to person, it could be related to a combination of reasons, economic issues, but also, war, conflict, repressing regimes or climate change (Kaya, 2002; Papadopoulos, 2011).

Third-country nationals: is used to refer to any person who is not a citizen in a EU Member State and who consequently cannot move freely in the Schengen area (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 5-6).

Undocumented migration: refers to third-country nationals who wish to enter the Schengen zone but do not have valid entry documents (i.e. passport, visa, travel document). Or third-country nationals who have entered the Schengen zone with falsified documents or with legal documents but have stayed for a longer period than authorized on their Schengen visa.

Search and rescue (SAR) at sea: consists of providing assistance to *people in distress at sea* and bringing them to a *place of safety*.

Security: is an ‘essentially contested concept’ and the meaning of it is socially constructed. In this research, security refers to a state where a person (i.e. migrants, refugees, society) or something (i.e. external borders of EU, Schengen zone, borders) is free from threats.

Threat: someone or something that puts into peril the safety of another person or a thing. And increased the exposure to danger and harm.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This study does not endeavor to make conclusions about the border regime as a whole. Rather, it provides insight into Europe's evolving border regime through the specific example of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and its operations in the Aegean Sea. Moreover, the aim of this research is not to come up with a 'solution' to the flow of migrants to Europe but rather to contribute, to some extent, to the existing discussions around migration, security and border control. This research is consequently divided into seven chapters and is structured as follows:

Chapter two addresses the questions related to methodology. After reflecting upon the qualitative nature of the study, my research strategy and data collection, management and analysis are presented. Chapter two also explores the ethical considerations that are crucial in qualitative research and discusses challenges and limitations of this research.

Chapter three discusses the theoretical framework of this thesis and provides both a brief literature review and engages with the main thematic concepts addressed in the study.

Chapter four presents the background of this subject and provides information on the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex. Furthermore, information on this study's geographical area and context are examined to further understand the topic of this research. It's important to note this study will not discuss the events that initially made people move from their countries of origin. Similarly, politics in those countries will not be the object of systematic investigation, but will be reviewed to provide context.

Chapter five presents the main findings of this study, whereas chapter six discusses the findings of this research and analyses the research questions presented. This study then ends with a conclusion, which summarizes and emphasizes the study's main discoveries and points of interest.

Chapter 2. Methodology

This chapter presents the methods used in this research. It should be noted that *qualitative research strategy* was employed as it was the most appropriate strategy to analyze the main topic of this research.

2.1. Qualitative Research

This study was carried out using qualitative research strategy, which was the appropriate research method given the content and context of Frontex and its activities at the external borders of the EU. It should be noted that in qualitative research the “formulation of research questions (...) is closely connected to the relevant literature” (Bryman, 2012, p. 385). Moreover, “the literature becomes significant at later stages of helping to inform theoretical ideas as they emerge from the data and as a way of contextualizing the significance of the findings” (Bryman, 2012, p. 385).

Qualitative research allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the ‘securitizing’ practices enacted by the EU in response to migration movements by sea into Europe. A qualitative research strategy was prioritized for this study, as the focus relates to experiences and opinions of respondents. Furthermore, document analysis was a critical aspect in this research. Thus, words and written documents also fall under qualitative data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012).

The process of conducting the research for this thesis entails a number of considerations. Methodological choices provide the necessary tools to conduct research and help decipher which information and data to collect, and how to analyse the collected information and data. It is important, however, to bear in mind that social research is generally underpinned by a set of assumptions about how knowledge is produced and acquired. Consequently, the methodological choices reflect the researcher’s ontological and epistemological position (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, Furlong and Marsch (2010) state that our ontological and epistemological positions “shape what we study as social scientists, how we study it and what we think can claim as a result of that study” (p. 189).

Ontology and epistemology are highly contested issues and have been the subject of various academic debates. *Ontology* can be defined as the theory of *being* and it is concerned with the nature of reality (Bryman, 2012). There are two broad ontological positions. First, *objectivism*, which implies that “social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33). Second, *constructionism*, which asserts that social phenomena is the outcome of the interactions between social actors. Social reality and the meanings we give to it are not only “produced through social interaction but that they are [also] in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33).

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge itself and is interested in how humans choose to know and understand our world (Bryman, 2012). The epistemological position known as *positivism*, is commonly used in natural sciences and advocates the use of methods of natural sciences to the study of the social world (Bryman, 2012). The *interpretivist* position in epistemology is commonly used in social sciences and is interested in the subjective understanding (Max Weber’s notion of *Verstehen*) of *how* and *why* reality happens. Social scientists following the interpretivist epistemology of qualitative research seek to gain knowledge by studying and interpreting human behavior and the social world (Bryman, 2012).

The ontological stance adopted in this research is rather constructionist. In other words, social phenomena and their meanings are perceived to be the result of the interactions among individuals within a specific societal context. Moreover, this study follows the interpretivist epistemology, with an aim to study and understand the nexus between border control, security and migration in a European context. More specifically, this thesis seeks to evaluate and disseminate the increased investment in Frontex by the EU, and how those initiatives impact the current migration ‘crisis’ in Europe. The meanings and interpretations provided in this thesis are likely to differ given a different time and social context.

2.2. Data collection

The relevant data to answer my research questions are gathered by using the following qualitative research methods: qualitative interviews and document analysis.

2.2.1. Interview process

Qualitative interviews were an efficient way to acquire information to answer my research questions. *Semi-structured interviews* were enacted, it enabled me to maintain a certain degree of flexibility during my investigation and to stay ‘on track’ through the different topics which needed to be addressed (Bryman, 2012).

All interviews were conducted remotely via Skype. Indeed, this is a great tool which allows people living in different countries to connect with each other despite the geographical distance. Since one of the respondents was in Greece and the other in Sweden, it was not possible for me to travel to those countries to do the interviews. Thus, using Skype allowed me to save a lot of time and it also allowed to conduct the interviews face-to-face with the respondents.

Prior to the interviews, I drafted an interview guide with a set of themes to be covered and a couple of pre-formulated open-ended questions. The latter were created for my personal use. Indeed, an interview guide is to be flexible, thus its main purpose was to help me as a researcher to stay on track of what was said and the topics that I needed to cover during the interviews (Bryman, 2012).

Moreover, the semi-structured interviews enabled me to conduct the interviews without strictly following the pre-formulated questions as outlined in my interview guide (Bryman, 2012). Thus, I was able to follow-up on interesting points made during the interviews and was able to ask for examples or explanations when a response was uncertain. This allowed the interviews to be more like a conversation, but at the same time maintain track on what was being said.

In the beginning stages of an interview, I briefly provided respondents with background information on my project and asked permission to audio-record the interview. Informed consent was obtained verbally and most of the interviews were recorded with the respective

consents and authorizations of the respondents. It should be noted that one of the interviewees did not want to be recorded, as additional permissions from the organization were required in order to do so. Nevertheless, the interview lasted nearly three hours and the interviewee has been very helpful. I had plenty of time to take notes and was able to ask for clarifications when something was not clear.

To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees and the confidentiality of the information they have provided, names have been omitted from this thesis with only use the name of the organization respondents worked for used. All interviews lasted between 1 hour 45 minutes and two and a half hours.

2.2.2. Qualitative sampling

Non-probability sampling was used to select key-informants for qualitative interviews. A non-probability sample is a “sample that has not been selected using a random sampling method. Essentially, this implies that some units of the population are more likely to be selected than others” (Bryman, 2012, p. 713). This approach was justified given the fact that the respondents were mainly selected due to their relevance to the topic of this study, the initial research questions and the objectives of this study.

I proceeded with a *purposive sampling strategy* whereby people and organizations were strategically targeted and contacted mainly due to their expertise and knowledge. Indeed, all of them work or have worked in the Aegean Sea and were considered as experts because they work either with migrants and refugees in Greece, for Frontex, for the Hellenic Coast Guard, or for a Search and Rescue NGOs. Initial contact with the respondents was established via email.

I sent out in total 21 emails with a brief description of my topic of research, why I contacted them and what was expected from the interviewees. However, given the availability of relatively few people and difficulty contacting organizations, and people working in the domain, the efforts turned out to be more difficult than thought (see Table 1. Interviews).

Table 1. Interviews

Emails sent	21
People who have responded	9
People who have agreed to participate, but dropped out of the study	3
People who have agreed to participate and have been interviewed	2

Consequently, I decided to employ *convenience sampling strategy* in my thesis. This approach consists of “a sample that is selected because of its availability to the researcher. It is a form of non-probability sample (Bryman, 2012, p. 710). Moreover, I also used snowball sampling to some extent wherein organizational personnel contacted referred me to other potential participants for my study. Representatives of Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), and other organizations contacted, were all extremely helpful. Even though they did not have the time to answer my questions, they suggested or guided me to someone with the experience relevant to the research. As stated by Bryman (2012), “a non-probability sample in which the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others” (p. 716).

The primary data was collected from a relatively small sample. Indeed, in total two people agreed to participate in the research. Both interviews were conducted via Skype.

The first respondent, has worked as ‘project coordinator on behalf of the International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) and as operational manager for the Swedish Sea Rescue Society in the Aegean Sea during the ‘crisis’. The IMRF is a non-governmental organization and it is one of the main search and rescue (SAR) agencies who have worked in the Aegean Sea. The second respondent, is a Lieutenant working for the Hellenic Coast Guard (a governmental organization) and is responsible of the operations in the Aegean Sea. The interviews enabled me to gather information and data from a balanced mix of key actors and stakeholders who either worked or still currently work in the Aegean Sea.

2.2.3. Document analysis

Furthermore, document analysis supported the data gathered from informants. The document analysis component of this thesis consisted of a detailed analysis of documents. Mostly material derived from various source like for instance, the website of Frontex was used for background analysis and objectives of the Agency. Official documents published by the EU helped to deepen my understanding of the evolving border regime and the legislative documents were a great source of information as well.

Document analysis was chosen as a key source of data because of the richness of information and data available in the documents that were relevant for this study. Document analysis was

also used to facilitate information gathering and analysis of subject matter to answer the research questions. Consequently, this thesis began with a review of the available literature, documents and institutional reports and analysis of the issues identified therein. Reviewing these available documents enabled me to become more familiar with my topic, to see how the questions related to migration, border control, and security were addressed in previous research and to identify some of the issues that were under-researched. Documents were analyzed by taking into account the specific social context within which the “texts were produced, transmitted, and received” (Bryman, 2012, p. 561).

The documents focused on in this thesis were officially published documents from the EU (i.e. statistical information, fact sheets), from Frontex (i.e. annual reports, risk analysis, fact sheets, mission statements, and press releases to understand the different operations and tasks of the Agency) and legislative documents available on *EUR-Lex* and other websites. I have also collected data from a conference, “Help! What can we do?”, organized on 16 February 2017 at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo. At this conference, the different panelists talked about the challenges’ thousands of refugees and migrants face on the Greek island of Lesbos in the Aegean Sea. The full audio-recording of this conference is also available on ‘Soundcloud’.

2.3. Data management

Adequately managing the collected information and data is crucial in qualitative research. Since some qualitative researchers tackle sensitive and very intimate issues, storing information in a safe place is critical. A proper and systematic storage of data enables the researcher to access, verify and go through the collected data anytime.

In this study, the information and data collected from interviews and conferences have been transcribed and printed to facilitate proper analysis. The material gathered from desk research have also been printed out and stored in different files in my room.

Even though I have taken notes of the main points said during the interviews, using audio-recording devices allowed me to focus on the actual task of interviewing. I played back to get

the specific details after the interview and reproduce exactly what the respondent has said. It was a time-consuming task and starting directly after the interview was important.

I have conducted data collection, management and analysis in parallel. For instance, I transcribed my interviews the day of interviewing and have compared my findings with the data that I already had from other sources. This enabled me to identify the emerging themes, the relevant and non-relevant passages and to see the similarities and differences between the findings.

2.4. Data analysis

Analysis of the collected data is one of the most crucial steps in any research. Data analysis is the process whereby the collected data is first divided and then coded. Bryman (2012) explains that coding is the process where “data are broken down into component parts, which are given names” (p. 568). In other words, this process consists of attempting to identify recurrent themes in the various documents and to code and classify the collected information into different themes or categories. The main objective is to identify trends in the data, compare-and-contrast different ideas and findings, and to make sense of the collected information.

In qualitative research, theory is generated from the collected data and information (Bryman, 2012). Since generating theory is not an easy task, it is suggested to start the process of coding at an early stage of the research. Bryman (2012) states that coding, in qualitative research, is a “constant state of potential revision and fluidity. The data are treated as potential indicators of concepts” (p. 568).

In qualitative research the researcher is able to go back and forth between different processes of research, thus data collection and analysis were done simultaneously. This allowed specific data to surface as relevant, then reassess and look for relevant findings when it was needed. Furthermore, going back and forth also enabled adjustment of the theoretical framework towards the findings.

I used *thematic analysis*. Indeed, in order to find a clear and coherent answer to my research questions, I have started the coding process by organizing the collected data and information (from the interviews and document analysis) into different themes. These themes included for instance: migration and security; migration in Greece/ in the Aegean Sea; security and threat; security and border control; IBM; SAR; and Frontex.

Then I further classified my data into the following sub-categories: (i) Nexus between migration and security; (ii) Stricter control and protection of the EU's external borders; (iii) SAR at sea and protection of people.

With the aim of attributing credibility and trustworthiness to my findings, relevant fragments of data such as interview quotations are used. In addition, desk research analysis provided a basis for triangulation. Indeed, the information collected from the interviews are triangulated with the information and data gathered from document analysis. The combination of these various sources of data enabled me to strengthen my research findings.

2.5. Ethical considerations

Numerous ethical aspects might arise while conducting social research. Ethics refers to the moral guidelines that lead a social researcher in their study, through the different processes from designing research proposal to defending the findings of the study.

However, such guidelines are not always straightforward. Nevertheless, one of the first things to consider is whether the researcher is applying the principle of doing 'no harm' throughout the research (Bryman, 2012; Berg & Lune, 2012). To ensure the research is ethically sound, particular attention has been paid to the relation between the researcher and the respondent (Bryman, 2012). To ensure the ethical treatment of my interviewees, I provided my respondents with some background information on my study and explained the reason and motivations for discussing the given topic with them.

Informed consent is an ethical aspect that needs to be taken into account (Bryman, 2012). Thus, prior to interviews, I informed the respondents that their participation was voluntary and that they could drop-out of the study anytime. Moreover, I sought to ensure respondents' informed consent and asked each of them if I could audio-record the interviews.

The right to privacy is another ethical aspect that should be considered (Bryman, 2012). The collected information was available only to me and were stored in a safe place in my room. In regards to the secondary data collected from document analysis, there was no need to put much consideration into the ethical treatment of my informants. Indeed, since the documents and the audio-recordings (from the conference in Oslo) that I have used are available in the public domain, there was no need to seek informed consent.

2.6. Limitations

I faced significant challenges and limitations while conducting the research for this thesis. The main limitation, respectively, was my lack of country level evidence. My inability to conduct fieldwork in Greece and the Aegean Sea region is a noteworthy limitation. Conducting field research would have enabled me to document empirical evidence to answer my research questions and make my own observations in the field to deepen my analysis. Nevertheless, the semi-structured interviews with key actors and stakeholders working the region as well as the analysis of available documents has enabled me to gather relevant information for data in this study.

The second aspect that represent a limitation is the limited number of interviews I conducted. Although I sent emails at an early stage of the research, I encountered challenges accessing key-informants. This can be explained by specific time and social context. With the events happening at the borders of the EU and the number of migrants and refugees trying to reach the shores of European countries between 2015 and 2017 (and continuing), most of the would-be key-informants were both under extreme pressure and busy. This, however, relates to some extent with the nature of qualitative studies as well, where getting access to key-informants is not always easy and often relies on luck accessing them (Bryman, 2012). Despite these challenges, this did not pose a big problem as I still managed to conduct interviews with two key actors working in the field.

Furthermore, a fundamental limitation related to this study was the extremely dynamic and complex realm of border control and migration in Europe. It was extremely difficult to keep pace with the speed of the events as they unfolded. Indeed, there have been several changes throughout the period in which this research was conducted. The Aegean Sea region,

specifically the Greek-Turkish border, was highly discussed in the media and among politicians when I started my research. However, with the closure of a migration route through Europe's Balkan countries and an agreement signed in March 2016 between the EU and Turkey, the flows of migrants and refugees have significantly decreased in the Aegean Sea. Nevertheless, the topic of this research remains particularly important in the sphere of EU politics and is one of the main topics of discussion between the EU member states today, and will remain so in the coming years.

Finally, despite these limitations and challenges, it should be noted that the data collected and presented in this research are valuable and trustworthy. *Trustworthiness* is an alternative criterion to reliability and validity to evaluate qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994 as cited in Bryman, 2012). Thus, with the aim of attributing trustworthiness to my findings, relevant fragments of data such as interview quotations are used. In addition, to ensure the *credibility* of my findings, the information collected from the interviews were *triangulated* with the information and data gathered from document analysis. The combination of these various sources of data enabled me to strengthen my research findings.

Chapter 3. Migration and Securitization: A theoretical framework

Considering the research questions of this study, this chapter presents the theoretical framework, which provides the rationale for interpreting and discussing the research findings in Chapter 6. Discussion.

3.1. Migration in International Relations

Migration has become one of the defining features of this century. Indeed, since the end of World War II, and as part of the broader trend of globalization, the movement of people and goods have steadily increased in different parts of the world. Today, millions of people are crossing international borders on a daily basis (Hollifield, 2012; Betts, 2011).

The interest in the study of migration from an International Relations (IR) theory perspective has started quite late (Johnson, 2017). During the period of Cold War (1945-1990) for instance, the topic of international migration did simply not make it into the agenda of IR. This is perhaps not very surprising, indeed as stated by Johnson (2017), “the discipline has traditionally focused on questions of stability and war in the international system”. In fact, scholars of IR had divided international politics into two categories, namely *high* and *low* politics. Following this, topics related to war and peace, national security, and foreign policy, would fall into *high* politics and were therefore considered as the predominant subjects of IR. Whereas topics related to migration fell into the realm of *low* politics, along with economic and societal issues, and therefore were not considered as main topics of interest and discussion of IR theorists (Hollifield, 2012).

It is only in the late 1990s, that a growing number of scholars have started to highlight that international migration actually intersects in many ways with IR (Johnson, 2017). Indeed, international migration can affect not only social and economic domains but also the domain of politics, policy and legislative agendas (Betts, 2011). Moreover, international migration can also produce regulatory challenges in states of departure, transit and arrival (Hollifield,

2012; Papadopoulos, 2011). Accordingly, international migration has slowly become an issue of high politics.

As Johnson (2017) writes, migration “is a function of the international system of states”. In fact, “without states, there are no borders to cross and it is the crossing of borders that remains at the heart of the politics of migration: who crosses, how, where, and why, are the operative issues at the heart of policymaking, debate, and practice in migration” (Johnson, 2017). Thus, the uncontrolled movement of people affects directly state’s borders, which is one of the key features of state sovereignty (Hollifield, 2012).

Considering the above mentioned, studying migration from an IR theory perspective is not only interesting, but it is also relevant. International migration raises various questions concerning “international regulatory frameworks and regimes, issues of governance, questions of cooperation, and the intersections between migration and security” (Johnson, 2017). Accordingly, this research focuses more specifically on the migration – security nexus (this is discussed in greater detail in subsection 3.3.).

3.2. Security in International Relations

Security is one of the major concerns in world politics (Williams, 2013). However, it means different things to different people and consequently there is no consensus on the definition of security (Williams, 2013). Various theoretical approaches and school of thoughts provide diverse interpretations of the concept however they are struggling to agree on one common definition (Diskaya, 2013). Thus, security is an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956 as cited in Williams, 2013; Williams, 2008; Karyotis, 2012).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that security is inevitably political and as stated by Williams (2013), “it plays a vital role in deciding who gets what, when, and how in world politics (p. 1).

On the same note Buzan (1991) states that security is a “powerful political tool in claiming attention for priority items in the competition for government attention” (as cited in Williams, 2013, p. 2).

Security studies have its “roots in the discipline of IR” (Williams, 2013). Traditional security studies, dominated by *realist* theories, are mainly state centric (Williams, 2013). For instance, during the Cold War, scholars of security studies were mainly preoccupied with the security

of states and have focused on the importance of military power to ensure the security of the specific state in question (Furuseth, 2003). The main subjects of research included among others war and tension between states, arms races and arms control, security dilemmas and territorial disputes (Williams, 2013).

With the end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union, the ways of thinking and the ways of looking at security have started to change. Various other approaches to security studies have emerged and a number of questions were raised like for instance: In which ways can non-military issues pose threat to security?; What do we mean by security and being secure?; Who are the agents of security and how can security be achieved? (Williams, 2013; McDonald, 2013).

In this research, a *constructivist* approach to security is employed. As Furuseth (2003) writes, “the common ground of constructivists is that the material world does not come classified (...) therefore, the objects of our knowledge are not independent of our interpretations and our language” (p. 12).

More specifically, the so-called Copenhagen school of security studies and its conceptual framework of securitization are used. As stated by McDonald (2013) securitization enables to get “a deeper insight into how security ‘works’ in world politics, and how politically important conceptions of security and threat actually come into being in different contexts” (p. 76). As stated by Neal (2009), “constructivist understanding of security (...) try to specify who constructs security (political elites, generally states), how they construct security (through the dramatic grammar of security under certain conditions) and where they construct (in the public, intersubjective, discursive sphere)” (p. 351).

3.2.1. Copenhagen School

The so-called Copenhagen School (CS) of security studies is a school of thought represented in the writings of scholars such as Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde based at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute in Denmark. The CS is primarily concerned with “how security is constructed and ‘works’ in world politics” (McDonald, 2013, p. 72).

With the publication of several academic works such as *Security: A new framework for analysis* (1998), these authors have significantly contributed to the broadening of the concept of security to encompass new policy challenges (Charrett, 2009). In *People, States and Fear:*

The National Security Problem in International Relations, for instance, Buzan (1983) states that the concept of security should not only refer to military or national security. But instead, economic, environmental, societal and political security issues should also be considered as important security challenges (Buzan, 1983).

Moreover, the CS shares the idea that security issues, as well as concepts such as *security* and *threat*, are *socially constructed* (Furuseth, 2003; Charrett, 2009; Diskaya, 2013). Thus, the CS has a more social constructivist approach to security (Charrett, 2009). In other words, unlike traditional theories of security studies, the CS focuses on social aspects of the concept of security (Charrett, 2009).

Indeed, according Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, security issues come into being through discourse or through what they refer to as *speech act*. Thus, they claim that there are no security issues in themselves, only issues that have been *securitized* or *constructed* as such through speech act (Hollifield, 2012; Huysmans, 2002).

Hence, scholars of CS are interested in exploring the processes through which an issue (i.e. migration) is constructed or articulated as an *existential threat* (Does, 2013). They are interested in understanding why and by whom these issues are represented as a threat. And, who listens and accepts these issues as constituting a security threat (Furuseth, 2003; Neal, 2009; Charrett, 2009; Leonard, 2010). To explore these issues, scholars of the CS have formulated the concept of securitization (Does, 2013; Diskaya, 2013; McDonald, 2013).

3.2.2. Securitization

Before explaining what securitization is, it should be noted that the securitization theory is not an IR theory as such. But it has been formulated by the CS of security studies, which has its roots in IR (Williams, 2013).

So, what is securitization? As presented by the CS, securitization can be understood as a process whereby “a securitizing actor defines a particular issue or actor as an ‘existential threat’ to a particular referent object and this move is accepted by a relevant audience” (McDonald, 2013, p. 73).

In other words, (1) a securitizing actor labels an issue as posing an existential threat to a referent object (McDonald, 2013). Thus, an issue becomes *securitized* when it is presented as posing a security threat to a referent object.

(2) By presenting an issue as an existential threat, the securitizing actor takes this issue out of normal politics and puts it into the realm of security politics (See figure 1. Securitization spectrum). The securitization spectrum presented below shows that by presenting an issue as a security threat, enables the securitizing actor to take an issue out of 'normal' bounds of political procedure and to move them into a securitized/ urgency level (Does, 2013). As Furuseth (2003) writes, securitized issues are “dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; (...) by labelling it as *security*, and agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means” (p. 18).

(3) The securitizing actor (i.e. the relevant authorities, state, politicians, ...) employ speech act (discourse) to convince and persuade a targeted audience to accept that a specific issue threatens the security of a referent object. And therefore, deserves immediate policy responses or practices that are outside the normal bounds of political procedure to curb the issue (Neal, 2009). On the same note, Charrett (2009) also adds that securitization is the “intersubjective establishment of an existential threat, which demands urgent and immediate attention, as well as the use of extraordinary measures to counter this threat” (p. 13).

Consequently, the following concepts are important in the process of securitization: “securitizing actor (i.e. the agent who presents an issue as a threat through a securitizing move), the referent subject (i.e. the entity that is threatening), the referent object (i.e. the entity that is threatened), the audience (the agreement of which is necessary to confer an intersubjective status to the threat), the context and the adoption of distinctive policies ('exceptional' or not)” (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 495).

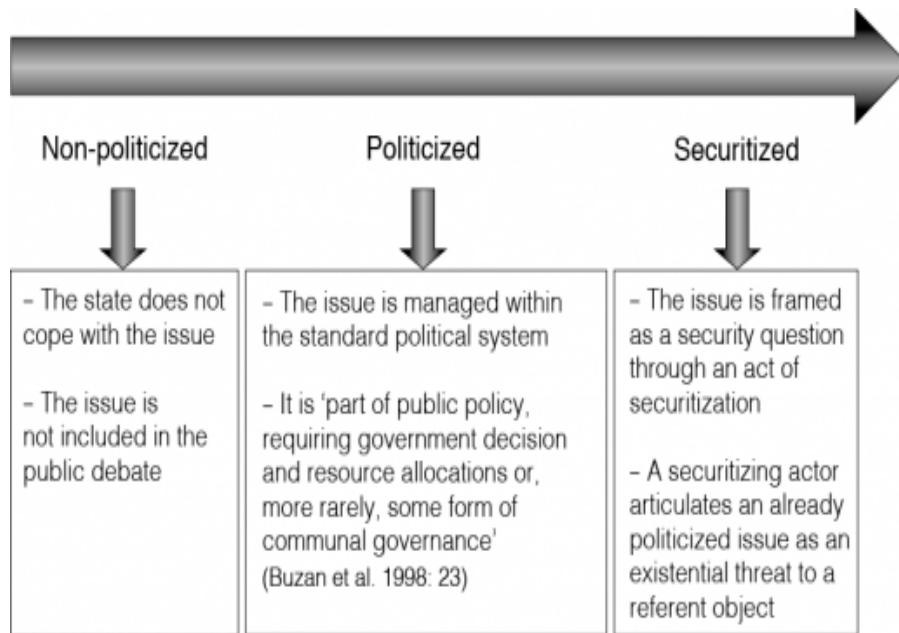


Figure 1. Securitization spectrum (source: Emmers, 2011, p. 138 as cited in Does, 2013)

Considering the above mentioned, one can say that security is a ‘self-referential practice’ (Buzan et al., 1998 as cited in Does, 2013). Indeed, Diskaya (2013) writes that in international relations, “an issue becomes a security issue not because something [necessarily] constitutes an object of threat to the state (or another referent object), but rather because an actor has defined something as existential threat to some object’s survival” (Diskaya, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is important to note, the fact that security is socially constructed, does not mean that everything can become easily securitized. Indeed, in order to ‘successfully’ securitize an issue (i.e. migration), a securitizing actor has to perform a securitizing move (present something as an existential threat to a referent object) which has to be accepted by a targeted audience (McDonald, 2013).

Consequently, another important aspect is the acceptance of the audience of this presentation. Indeed, in a ‘successful’ securitization process, the aim is to convince a targeted audience to accept that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve immediate policy to curb it. It is only when the targeted audience accepts this securitization move, an issue “can be moved above the sphere of normal politics, allowing elites to break normal procedures and rules and implement emergency measures” (Diskaya, 2013; Does, 2013).

The so-called Copenhagen School has significantly contributed in the broadening of the agenda of security studies (Does, 2013). Nevertheless, the CS's approach to security and its securitization theory have been criticized by various scholars for being "too limited, too focused upon the speech act and thus not serving a useful purpose in the study of real world situations" (Does, 2013). This brings us to the so-called Paris School, which proposes a slightly different model of securitization.

3.2.3. Paris School

Didier Bigo, Jef Huysmans, Thierry Balzacq, Anastassia Tsoukala, Ayse Ceyhan, and Elspeth Guild lead another group of scholars the so-called 'Paris School'. These academics have developed a *sociological* model of securitization theory (Leonard, 2010).

Scholars of the Paris School (PS) focus more specifically on *securitizing practices*. They claim that the different practices of bureaucratic structures, networks linked to security practices and the use of specific technologies can play a more active role in securitization process than securitizing speech act alone (Leonard, 2010).

Indeed, according to the PS it is possible to securitize certain issues without discourse or speech act (Leonard, 2010). Securitization has become institutionalized over time and according to the scholars of PS, there are cases where logic of security is at play, even without securitizing discourse. Thus, the scholars of the PS highlight the importance of analyzing securitization through practices and the use of *tools* and *instruments* to alleviate threats (Leonard, 2010).

Consequently, the PS focuses on the practices of various actors, be it states or non-state actors (i.e. companies, professionals, experts and individuals). Here as well, security is perceived as being *socially constructed* (cf. CS's approach to security).

In her study, Leonard (2010) has identified two types of securitizing practices: practices usually used to tackle issues widely considered as security threats (i.e. terrorism, foreign-armed threat). Then, 'extraordinary' or 'out of the ordinary' practices, measures that have not been previously applied to a specific policy issue in a political context.

3.3. Migration – Security nexus

A number of references in academic and political debates have highlighted the increasing interest in migration related issues in IR (Huysmans, 2002; Eleftheria-Papi, 2015). Indeed, due to its extreme politicization in recent years, international migration has become highly intertwined with contemporary security politics (Leonard, 2010).

More specifically, international migration has become a topic of interest in ‘securitization’ studies (Balzacq et al., 2016). The main priority of these studies was to explore how non-traditional security issues such as migration enter into the realm of security (Huysmans, 2002; Eleftheria-Papi, 2015).

The scholars of the so-called Copenhagen School and Paris School have been extremely active in addressing issues related to migration and security. As explained in the previous sub-sections, the PS and CS state that security is socially constructed.

However, this does not mean that everything can be easily securitized. Indeed, according to the CS of security studies, in order to ‘successfully’ securitize migration (or any other issue), a securitizing actor has to perform a securitizing move (present something as an existential threat to a referent object) which has to be accepted by a targeted audience (McDonald, 2013).

Balzacq et al. (2016) writes, “migration originally entered the field of securitization through its association with the concept of ‘societal security’” (p. 508). Thus, by including migration within the security framework, migration was presented as a threat to ‘societal security’. Societal security refers to “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 508).

According to the scholars of the PS of security studies, turning migration into security problems involves the mobilization of certain resources to curtail the problem (Huysmans, 2002). Indeed, Bigo (2002) claims that securitization of migration emerges from “the correlation between some successful speech acts of political leaders, the mobilization they create for and against some groups of people, and the specific field of security professionals” (as cited in Leonard, 2010, p. 235). Thus, according to scholars of the PS, a ‘successful’ securitization process is constituted not only by speech act is not enough and there needs to

be securitizing practices. Indeed, Bigo states that even though speech acts are important, “the securitization of migration: comes also from a range of administrative practices such as population profiling, risk assessment [...], and what may be termed a specific habitus of the ‘security professional’ with its ethos of secrecy and concern for the management of fear and unease” (Balzacq et al., 2016, p. 510).

In recent years, there has been a great number of discussions and debates on securitization of migration in Europe. As stated by Balzacq et al. (2016), “Most scholars have argued that asylum and migration have been successfully securitized in the EU” (p. 509). The aim of this research is to contribute, to some extent, to the discussions around the nexus between migration, security and border control in Europe.

Chapter 4. Background

This chapter seeks to contextualize the topics discussed in this thesis. To this end, first this section provides some background information on contemporary migration to Europe. Then, it goes on by presenting the challenges of migration in the Aegean Sea. After that, it provides a brief overview on Frontex and presents its operations in the Aegean Sea.

4.1. Migration to Europe

With the Schengen-free movement agreement, signed in 1985 in Luxembourg, European countries hailed the advent of a new border-free Europe (European Commission, 2015). Indeed, since 1995, with the establishment of the Schengen area, internal borders (common land, air, sea, river and lake borders of the EU Member States) are eliminated among the Schengen member states (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 1).

Currently, 26 countries are members of the Schengen area (EU Schengen member states: Luxembourg, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein. In addition, the Non-EU Schengen member states: Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland) (European Commission, 2015).

In the Treaty of Amsterdam, which came into effect in 1999, the Schengen Agreement was incorporated into the European Union framework. However, Andersson (2016) states that the Schengen Agreement has produced a “‘halfway house’ between European integration and retained sovereign powers” (p. 1058).

The European migration ‘crisis’ has raised several questions regarding how to respond more efficiently and effectively to the migratory pressures and challenges encountered at the external borders of the EU at both state and European levels. Although new actors like Frontex are now responsible for monitoring and securing the external borders (land, air and sea borders) of the European Union (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, Art. 2, point 2), the final decision on who gets in, be it asylum seekers, temporary residents, or visitors, has been left to

the individual EU Member States (Von Helldorff, 2015). In fact, it is noteworthy that migration and asylum has up until now been within the competences of individual EU Member States (European Commission, 2013).

Nevertheless, the occurrence of several tragedies at the external borders of the EU like for instance off the Italian island of Lampedusa in October 2013. A boat carrying around 500 people to Europe sank near the island of Lampedusa and only 155 people survived (UNHCR, 2013). Or the images of a young Syrian boy “whose body washed up on a Turkish beach after a failed attempt to reach Greece” (Spindler, 2015), have made the issue a matter of common concern (Von Helldorff, 2015).

Consequently, the EU has set up various mechanisms to support ‘frontline’ Member States in areas related to asylum, migration, and border management. For instance, since 1999 the European Union has worked towards the creation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (European Commission, 2014). The CEAS is composed of various directives such as the Reception Conditions Directive (Council Directive 2013/33/EU), the Asylum Procedure Directive (Council Directive 2013/32/EU), the Qualification Directive (Council Directive 2011/95/EU), and the Return Procedures Directive (Council Directive 2008/115/EC) amongst others (European Commission, 2014; Von Helldorff, 2015). Another example is the Global Approach to Migration Mobility (GAMM) adopted with the aim to “address all relevant aspects of migration in a balanced and comprehensive way, in partnership with non-EU countries” (European Commission, 2017). All these measures, however, are only a small step in the bigger path towards effective and more harmonized legislation and practices of the EU Member States.

Migration into Europe represent only a small slice of global displacement. For a Union with almost 512 million inhabitants (as of 1 January 2017) (Eurostat, 2017) and with all the economic and most advanced resources at its disposal, one would think that the ‘crisis’ would be manageable (Andersson, 2016). Nonetheless, lack of solidarity among the different EU member states makes it difficult to provide a common and effective response. As stated by Tassinari (2016), migration management has always been and remains one of the most “complex, politicized, and least integrated policies in Europe” (p. 71). On the same note, in the words of Samaddar (2016), “migration to Europe hurts the core of the unification project” (p. 89).

The influx of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants is raising questions about the integrity of the Schengen zone and is causing increasing doubts and divisions about the so-called ‘European values’ of democracy, human rights and solidarity (Debating Europe, 2016). Indeed, in response to the latest waves of migration, some European countries such as Austria and France have temporarily re-established internal border controls for ‘national security’ reasons (European Commission, 2017). An evolution which is also related to some extent to other events like terror attacks in European metropolises like Paris and Brussels.

Managing borders has become an important and challenging task in the 21st century. As internal borders are eliminated among member states of the European area, new barriers – both physical and bureaucratic – are created between Europe and the rest of the world, thus reinforcing the image of *Fortress Europe* (Kaya, 2002; Samaddar, 2016; Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016). The term Fortress Europe has been used by various scholars to refer “to all the restrictive immigration and asylum policies that have been implemented to stem migration flows to Europe” (Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016)

Today a large number of actors are responsible for monitoring the borders of Europe like for instance police forces, border and coast guards, navy patrols, national governments, immigration officials to name just a few (Carr, 2012). In addition, besides Frontex, the European Union spends large sums into Europe-wide security initiatives (i.e. Eurosur and Europol) and into new technologies i.e. aerial and satellite surveillance to deter people from unauthorized border crossings (Tassinari, 2016). Eurosur is the European Border Surveillance system. It is a “multipurpose system for cooperation between the EU Member States and Frontex in order to improve situational awareness and increase reaction capability at external borders. The aim is to prevent cross-border crime and irregular migration” (European Commission, 2017). Moreover, Europol is the European Union’s law enforcement agency and it “supports law enforcement authorities throughout the EU on crime fighting activities in all its mandated areas” (Europol, 2017).

In response to the high migratory pressure, European leaders have opted for a ‘default’ border security model, as border control is one of the main features of state sovereignty (Von Helldorff, 2015). While it is the legitimate right of any government to prevent undocumented migration, and secure their borders, according to some scholars, the borders of Europe have become militarized instruments of exclusion and repression over the last decade (Michalowski, 2016; Carr, 2012). In fact, costly technologies have been developed and

fences have been built (i.e. in Greece in 2012, Spain in 2005, Hungary in 2015, Bulgaria in 2015) under the pretext to better control and monitor undocumented migration movements into the EU (Andersson, 2016; Michalowski, 2016). All these have transformed the Mediterranean as well as the Aegean Sea to one of the most militarized maritime borders in the world (Carr, 2012). The so-called migration and refugee crisis is clearly challenging the European politicians and has triggered a political crisis in the EU. The full scale of the issue is still unfolding.

4.2. Migration in Greece and the Aegean Sea

Several other EU Member States on the European ‘frontline’ could have served to examine the issue, nevertheless as mentioned in the introduction, this study focuses on the issue of migration, security and border control in Greece and more specifically in the Aegean Sea.

As stated by Carr (2012), the unprecedented migratory pressure has added an additional “element of insecurity and paranoia to a border already charged with geopolitical tensions” (p. 89). Indeed, between 1 January and 15 December 2014, around 41,300 migrants were intercepted at the Turkish-Hellenic maritime border, which represents nearly 300% increase compared to the number in 2013 (Frontex, 2016). Moreover, 2015 and 2016 have been the years with the largest number of undocumented migrants trying to reach the shores of the EU and the deadliest years considering the number of people who have perished at Sea (UNHCR staff, 2016).

The Aegean Sea (see Figure 2. Map of the Aegean Sea) is located between the Greek and the Anatolian peninsulas, and the island of Crete defines its southern border (The editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2016). It is important to note that Greece has long been a country of emigration (when a person decides, “to leave one’s place of residence or country to live elsewhere” (Merriam-Webster, 2017)) before becoming a country “with one of the highest rates of in-migration in the European Union” (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2012, p. 33).

This is due to several factors. With its membership to the Schengen area and the European Union, the country has become a key gateway to Europe. Indeed, Greece acts as a transit for migrants predominantly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia and to some extent from Sub-Saharan African countries (Frontex, 2016).



Figure 2. Map of the Aegean Sea (adapted from ICAO FIR WORLD, 2017)

Between 2010 and 2012, undocumented migrants mainly used the land border between Turkey and Greece. However, due to the restricted legal ways to enter the European territory, the maritime passage between Turkey and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea started to act as one of the main entry points into the EU (Klepp, 2010). Indeed, with the increasingly tightened border controls, the construction of the anti-migrant wire fence near the Evros River and the closure of the Balkan route, the sea crossings between the Greek and Turkish border has seen a sharp increase in 2015 and 2016 (Samaddar, 2016; Frontex, 2016).

Moreover, the flows of refugees and migrants in the Aegean Sea have increased due to the knowledge that the crossing from Turkey to the Dodecanese and the Northeast Aegean islands are relatively shorter and ‘safer’ than the central Mediterranean route. In fact, for instance the distance between the Turkish coast and Greek island of Chios is four nautical miles, which is approximately 7.5 kilometers (Frontex, 2016). Alternatively, to the island of Lesbos it takes 5.7 nautical miles, which is approximately 10 kilometers (Frontex, 2016).

Even though, this might sound like a quiet short distance, it is important to bear in mind that “with unstable weather conditions and overcrowded and unseaworthy (rubber boats) the death toll is high” (Frontex, 2016, para. 28). In 2017 alone, around 19,522 people have arrived in Europe by sea, among whom 522 were reported dead or missing at sea (as of 10 March 2017) (UNHCR, 2017).

Undocumented migration is not a new phenomenon in Greece, the local population in Greece had to witness the arrival of boats packed with families and children and had to deal with the situation for years. Scholars such as Swarts and Karakatsanis (2012) and Karyotis (2012) have studied migration in Greece and more specifically in relation to security. They have noticed an increasing perception among local population and politicians that migration is represented as a threat not only to national and territorial security but also to societal security (cultural integrity, identity, employment, social order...). This was noticed for instance with the *Law 1975/1991*, entitled ‘Police control of the border passages, ingression, residence, employment and expulsion of foreigners and immigrants identification proceeding’, which was adopted by the Greek Parliament in 1991 (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2012). As the name already indicates, the aim was to curb migration and to remove undocumented migrants from the country (Swarts and Karakatsanis, 2012).

For most people trying to reach Europe, Greece is not a destination but rather as a transit country. It is known that those who have managed to reach the Greek islands do not want to stay there, but want to head further north to Germany, Austria, Sweden or Norway (Frontex, 2016). However, under the Dublin III Regulation, “the first Member State in which the application for international protection was lodged shall be responsible for examining it” (Regulation (EU) No 604/2013, Chapter II, Art. 3, para. 2). This puts a lot of pressure and burden on the Hellenic government, which is already suffering from the effects of the financial and political crisis of 2015 (Samaddar, 2016).

The Hellenic authorities have been heavily criticized at several occasions of its inability to control the influx of undocumented migrants and the cruel ways in which they treat those who have managed to reach Greece.

Currently, tens of thousands of migrants are ‘stranded’ in Greece (UNHCR, 2017). According to the ‘daily map indicating capacity and occupancy’ published by the UNHCR (as of 14 February 2017), there are a total of 13,339 people in official and informal sites and

other state run facilities on Greek islands in the Aegean Sea. However, the maximum capacity of these facilities is 8,926.

More specifically, the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos have been heavily affected by the situation. According to the UNHCR (as of 10 February 2017), on one of the islands Samos, “continued overcrowding and poor weather (...) are contributing to a high number of incidents of self-harm, suicide attempts, panic attacks, and aggressive behavior” (p. 2). Nearly one year has passed and the situation does not seem to have much improved on these islands and the needs are still high (John, 2017).

4.3. Frontex and Joint Operations in the Aegean Sea

With migration routes being displaced to the maritime border between Turkey and Greece, Frontex has seen its presence intensify in the region.

It is in this ever-growing political concern over migratory pressures at the external borders of the EU, that the European Border and Coastguard Agency (hereinafter referred to as Frontex or the Agency) has been launched in 2016 (European Commission, 2016).

It is noteworthy that the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) is constituted of both the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and national border authorities of EU Member States. Thus, Frontex works in close cooperation with national authorities to supervise border controls and to ensure the effective management of migration flows (European Commission, 2016).

Joint Operations (JO) in maritime border regions have significantly increased over the last couple of years (Klepp, 2010). With the dramatic increase of loss of lives as well as increase of human smuggling and undocumented migration along the maritime borders between Greece and Turkey in 2015, the Hellenic authorities have requested additional assistance at its borders (Frontex, 2015). In response to this situation, the EU has decided to increase Frontex’s presence at sea and has tripled its resources and strengthened its capacities (European Commission, 2016; Frontex, 2015; Von Helldorff, 2015).

Thus, the assets available for Frontex Joint Operation Poseidon (as of 28 December 2015 – Poseidon Rapid Intervention) were significantly increased. Joint Operation Poseidon operates

in eastern Mediterranean and on Greece's most affected islands (Frontex, 2015; European Commission, 2016).

Operation Poseidon is a joint maritime operation coordinated by Frontex and 23 countries are involved in the operation (Frontex, 2015). The host country is Greece; and the participating countries include Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom.

The JO has been deployed in the Aegean Sea to provide technical support to the Hellenic authorities, tackle cross border crime, human smuggling activities at sea and control irregular migration towards the European Union (European Commission, 2016; Frontex, 2015).

More specifically, the aim of the JO is to support the Hellenic border surveillance activities at sea. To do so, the JO combines various activities such as border surveillance and checks, search and rescue operations, registration and identification of migrants and refugees, but it does also assist Greece in returns and readmissions (European Commission, 2016; Frontex, 2015). Between January and August 2016, the Operation Poseidon has rescued around 37,479 people in the Aegean with the involvement of Frontex (European Commission, 2016).

According to Frontex (2015), the operational aims are implemented "in full compliance with the relevant EU and international law, the respect for fundamental rights in particular the access to international protection and the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement" (p. 5-6). However, pro-migrant groups and human rights activists have heavily criticized the Agency especially in relation to these points.

Moreover, in March 2016, the EU has signed an agreement with Turkey to halt migratory flows from Turkey to Greece. In exchange, Turkey was promised increased financial support, visa liberalization, and other inducements. In consequence of this EU-Turkey accord, which came into effect on 18 March 2016, the crossings along the Aegean Sea and the arrivals to Greece dropped nearly overnight. In April 2016, around 202 people were returned from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement (UNHCR, 2017).

Currently, this maritime route is largely shut down, but the question is for how long? The agreement seems to have only pushed the issue further into the central Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it is still quite early to see the full effects of this agreement.

Chapter 5. Findings

The following chapter is divided into two parts. The first part presents the findings related to Frontex and the way it is deployed specifically in the Aegean Sea. Whereas the second part approaches the interlink between migration, border control, security and the role of Frontex in these.

5.1. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency

In response to the new political realities and challenges faced by the EU, with regards to both internal security and the effective management of migration flows, various instruments and agencies needed to be developed (European Commission, 2016). One of these measures is the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

Frontex's presence in frontline EU member states such as Greece has increased and the Agency has seen its tasks and mandate increasingly expand over the last years. Indeed, as stated in the European Commission's press indicate (2016, October 6), Frontex "is part of the measures set out under the European Agenda on Migration to reinforce the management and security of the EU's external borders. The Schengen area without internal borders is only sustainable if the external borders are effectively secured and protected".

5.1.1. Evolution and legal framework

In December 2015, as a response to the challenges related to the influx of migrants and refugees at the external borders of the EU, the European Commission proposed to create a European Border and Coast Guard (*COM (2015) 671 final*). An institutional agreement was quickly reached between the Council and the European Parliament in September 2016 on the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG).

The EBCG was designed to both respond to the migratory challenges in Europe and to ensure the security of the Union (Frontex, 2017). The EBCG is constituted by the national border

authorities of the EU member states as well as the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency (commonly referred to as Frontex).

Frontex agency was originally established on October 26th, 2004 with the Council *Regulation (EC) 2007/2004*. It was called the ‘European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union’. The Agency was developed to mainly prevent and reduce undocumented migration into the EU (Frontex, 2014). Although the Agency has been active since 2005, it has not been very effective in reducing undocumented migration into Europe. Indeed, Frontex did not have enough resources and relied heavily on the contribution of the Member States regarding operational staff and needed the prior authorization of Member States before being able to carry out border management operations (European Commission, 2016).

Thus, the *Regulation (EU) 2016/1624* of September 14, 2016, built on the foundation of Frontex by reinforcing the Agency and entrusted it with a new mandate. Moreover, with this regulation the old ‘European Agency for the Management of operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union’ has been renamed to ‘European Border and Coast Guard Agency’. However, the new Agency has kept the same short name Frontex and has still the same legal personality (Frontex, 2017).

5.1.2. Competences and tasks

With *Regulation (EU) 2016/1624*, Frontex’s mandate has been expanded and reinforced, the Agency has become better equipped and has now the necessary tools and finances to effectively act in different borderline countries (European Commission, 2016).

Indeed, Frontex’s permanent staff has slowly increasing from 400 members in 2016 and is expected to be around 1550 officers by 2020. The Agency’s staff will be deployed to provide support at the external borders of the EU Member States (European Commission, 2017).

EU funding for Frontex’s activities have increased significantly, it was 250 million euros in 2016, 281 million euros in 2017 and is expected to increase up to 320 million euros by 2020 (European Commission, 2017). This increase in funding will enable the Agency “to purchase its own equipment and deploy them in border operations at short notice” (European Commission, 2016). The financial resources for the joint operations Poseidon (in the Aegean

Sea) and Triton (in the Mediterranean Sea) have been tripled to address undocumented migration and cross border crime via the Sea (European Commission, 2017).

5.1.3. Frontex's role in Integrated Border Management (IBM)

One of the tasks of Frontex enhanced under its new mandate is to promote, coordinate and ensure the efficient implementation of the Integrated Border Management (IBM).

The IBM strategy is not only about simple checks and patrols at external borders (European Commission, 2015). IBM goes beyond Europe's borders, as stated by Frontex (2017), IBM goes from "exchange of information to cooperation on returns, Frontex has been extending its reach beyond Europe" (Frontex, Risk Analysis for 2017, p. 7).

On the same note, it is stated in the *Regulation No 2016/1624*, that the main role of Frontex is to: "establish a technical and operational strategy for implementation of integrated border management at Union level; to oversee the effective functioning of border control at the external borders; to provide increased technical and operational assistance to Member States through joint operations and rapid border interventions; to ensure the practical execution of measures in a situation requiring urgent action at the external borders; to provide technical and operational assistance in the support of search and rescue operations for persons in distress at sea; and to organize, coordinate and conduct return operations and return interventions." (Preamble, Recital 11)

In other words, the concept of European integrated border management (IBM) referred to hereafter consists of a combination of various tasks and functions. First, these tasks include for instance "the coast guard function and associated" (Frontex, 2017) search and rescue operations "for persons in distress at sea" (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, Chapter 1, art. 4).

Then, the Agency is responsible for monitoring "migratory flows towards and within the EU; the prevention and detection of cross-border crime" (Frontex, 2017). But the Agency is also responsible for the "analysis of the risks for internal security and analysis of the threats that may affect the functioning or security of the external borders" (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, Chapter 1, art. 4).

Moreover, under its new mandate, the Agency will also provide its assistance to frontline Member States in handling arrivals and identification processes (i.e. screening, debriefing) at

the external borders of the EU (*Regulation No 2016/1624*). Thereby, also assisting Member States in the completion of their responsibilities under the EURODAC Regulation (*Regulation (EU) No 603/2013*). The Agency also assists Member States in the coordination of the return of third-country nationals who have entered or overstayed in the EU without the necessary documents (*Regulation No 2016/1624*).

Frontex's new key-task is also to ensure the "better assessment of vulnerabilities of Europe's national border authorities in the light of potential challenges at their external borders" (Frontex, 2017, p. 7). Nevertheless, it should be noted that "the responsibility for the control and surveillance of external borders lies entirely with the EU Member States" (Frontex, 2014, p. 6) and ensuring the European IBM is a responsibility that is shared between Frontex, the EU and the member states (Frontex, 2017).

5.1.4. Deployment at the EU's external borders

Since already 2005, Frontex's role was to "promote, coordinate and develop integrated border management. However, until now Frontex had only been granted a limited role in supporting Member States to manage their external borders" (European Commission, 2015). However, the European migration 'crisis' has shown the limitations of the Agency in tackling appropriately the situation. Indeed, as stated by the European Commission (2015), "limited resources in terms of staff and equipment, an inability to initiate and carry out return or border management operations and the absence of an explicit role to conduct search and rescue operations – have hindered its ability to effectively address significant increases of migratory pressure".

Before Frontex can be deployed in any EU member state, an operational plan needs to be agreed between Frontex and the home Member State which is participating in the JO coordinated by Frontex (Frontex, 2014). The JO and rapid border interventions are employed at the external borders of the EU in order to assist and EU member states.

Moreover, as the European Commission (2015) writes: "Its [Frontex's] strengthened mandate will include monitoring and supervisory responsibilities, as well as the capacity to intervene in urgent situations either at the request of a Member State, or when a Member State is unable or unwilling to act" (European Commission, 2015). Thus, EU Member States "can

request joint operations and rapid border interventions, and deployment of the European Border and Coast Guard Teams to support these. Where deficiencies persist or where a Member State is under significant migratory pressure putting in peril the Schengen area and national action is not forthcoming or not enough, the Commission will be able to adopt and implementing decision determining that the situation at a particular section of the external border requires urgent action at European level. This will allow the Agency to step in and deploy European Border and Coast Guard Teams to ensure that action is taken on the ground even when a Member State is unable or unwilling to take the necessary measure” (European Commission, 2015)

However, it should be noted that Frontex will act under the host Member States legal frameworks. Indeed, “during the deployment of European Border and Coast Guard teams, the host Member State shall issue instructions to the teams in accordance with the agreed operational plan. Members of the teams shall perform their tasks in respect of EU and international law and fundamental rights obligations, and the national law of the host Member State” (European Commission, 2015)

5.1.5. Fundamental rights in Frontex’s activities

Frontex operations shall in theory be performed in respect and full compliance with the relevant “EU law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the relevant international law, including the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951, the respect for fundamental rights, in particular the access to international protection, and the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement” (Frontex, 2014, p. 6).

Since 2016, the new *Regulation (EU) 2016/1624* has provided the Agency with “stronger role and enhanced operational tasks of the Agency, [moreover] the new Regulation established a number of fundamental rights safeguards for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency” (European Commission, 2016).

Additionally, the Agency has to take all the necessary measures and initiatives to ensure that “all border guards and other personnel of the Member States who participate in the European Border Guard Teams, as well as Frontex staff members, have received, prior to their participation in operational activities, a training in relevant EU and international law, including fundamental rights and access to international protection and guidelines for the

purpose of identifying persons in need of protection and directing them towards the appropriate authorities and facilities” (Frontex, 2014, p. 6).

On the same note, “all persons involved in Frontex activities are obliged to maintain the highest standards of integrity, ethical conduct, professionalism and respect of fundamental rights. (...) While taking part in activities coordinated by Frontex they are obliged to comply with European law, international law, fundamental rights and national law of the host Member State” (Frontex, 2014, p. 7).

5.1.6. Critique

Despite the above mentioned obligations, it should be highlighted that in practice there seems to be a gap between what has been decided on papers and what is concretely done in the field. Indeed, it should be noted that in the past years Frontex’s activities have attracted serious criticism from NGOs, human rights lawyers, civil society, national and international media. Frontex operational activities were criticized as turning a blind eye on human rights (information from the interviews).

Moreover, laying out Frontex’s missions and powers demonstrates that even though the agency conducts search and rescue operations at sea, the main purpose of the involvement of the agency in external border regions of the EU is more complex. In fact, Frontex’s objective is foremost to ensure the internal security of the EU and to decrease or stop undocumented migration into the EU.

Indeed, as stated in Frontex’s Risk Analysis for 2017, the objectives of Frontex is to contribute to the “building the capacity to deploy border and coast guard forces rapidly and efficiently, to support return measures, and to collect and process personal data. All of these efforts support Europe’s migration management process and foster closer cooperation with key non-EU countries in areas related to migration. These measures have a single aim of preserving the free movement within the Schengen area” (Frontex, 2017, p. 7).

Thus, security considerations (i.e. ensuring border security) continue to predominate the agencies activities. As Frontex (2017) describes it itself, the Agency “is constantly monitoring the newest products, services, technologies and developments in the field of border security. (...) the use of such tool can potentially improve the capacity of these

authorities to act in a pro-active way to prevent, amongst other things, illegal migration and cross-border crime in the maritime domain”.

The recurrence of a number of tragedies at high sea, as well as the arbitrary detention of people on Greek islands have brought into question the legality of all these operations. Maybe instead of investing that much in technologies and tools to counter migrants and protect the borders, the EU politicians should focus their attention on the people who are making these dangerous sea crossings and on their fundamental rights.

During the conference called “Help! What can we do?” in February 2017 in Oslo, the different panelists have all highlighted the need for more support in the reception centers and on the Greek islands such as Lesbos but above all the need for the implementation of a genuine reception policy. With the EU-Turkey agreement and enhanced border management, the number of people arriving on these islands might have reduced significantly compared to the numbers in 2015. Nevertheless, the migration ‘crisis’ is not over. Before people were just going through the islands in the Aegean Sea, but now they are just ‘blocked’ and ‘stuck’ (information from the conference).

Various NGOs and human rights activists are criticizing the poor conditions in these detention centers and the lack of support from the EU authorities. Indeed, Moria, one of the main ‘reception’ center on the island of Lesbos is described as being a “*garbage place, a garbage place with thousands of people*” (Information from conference).

5.2. Migration, border control, security and the role of Frontex

5.2.1. Migration in the Aegean Sea

The intense migratory pressure in Europe is undoubtedly challenging the European Union. Particularly the countries at the borderline of the EU, like Greece, are the ones that are the most challenged by the arrival of a wide number of people.

Irregular migration across the Sea border from Turkey to Greece is however not new. As explained during the conference (in Oslo), “*the crisis didn’t started for us in 2015, the refugees started to come in Lesbos in bigger numbers in 2001. And we have already deaths, many deaths registered. And in 2009 the flows stops and it goes the Northern border of Greece and 2012 we have again refugees arriving in Lesbos*” (information from conference).

Nevertheless, the sharp increase of migrants entering through the ‘tight’ maritime border between Turkey and Greek islands in 2015 has marked a real turning point in terms of EU’s response. The increase in human tragedies at high seas in Greece, has “triggered a more institutionalized approach to surveillance operations” (EPSC Strategic Notes, 2017, p. 1). This has also prompted the involvement of various NGOs. However, despite all the measures that have been taken, the number of people taking boats and the number of deaths at sea continued to increase (EPSC Strategic Notes, 2017).

As stated by Frontex (2017), “Member States reported more than 511 000 detections of illegal border-crossing, which corresponds to roughly 382 000 new arrivals from Africa, the Middle East and Asia. This was a significant decrease in comparison with 2015, when over one million migrants came to the EU. However, the overall situation at Europe’s external borders remained challenging. The decrease in arrivals was mainly caused by fewer migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey. This drop was a result of the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 and the introduction of stricter border-control measures” (p. 6).

Greece is one of the first EU frontline MS, besides Italy, which benefits from Frontex’s operational support. Indeed, in the aftermath of highly mediatized events, the EU has launched “a major military-supported humanitarian and border control operation (...) which saw both sea and air capabilities deployed” in the Greek and Turkish ‘Search and Rescue’ (SAR) zones (EPSC Strategic Notes, 2017, p. 1).

As the presented in the interviews, legislative problems hinder however the effective SAR work in the Aegean Sea. Indeed, Greece is a bureaucratic country, where everything is extremely regulated and one needs always specific authorizations. Indeed, in Greece, “*there are legislations how to incorporate voluntary search and rescue work...in the area. However, there are very little instruction how that legislation is to be applied. And this is a problem Greece has, because Greece is a bureaucratic country. But they also have a legislation system, which requires any legislation to also have an instruction on how it should be applied*” (information from interview).

However, in regards to the great number of people arriving on daily basis on the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea between 2015 and 2016, the Hellenic Coast Guard was not able to handle the situation alone. Indeed, as highlighted in one of the interviews, “*this was the struggle that the [Hellenic] Coast Guard had, because they couldn’t coordinate all this*”.

Thus, there was a big need for further EU support. As both of my interviewees have stated, coordination between SAR non-governmental organizations and governmental organizations is very important in the Aegean Sea. Moreover, an interesting point made during one of the interviews was: *“something I think is very, very important, is also to remember...which is a big difference between the southern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, is that Greece is still a full functional, operational country. (...) It is still a normally functioning country, and you can’t just march in, (...) and start to do search and rescue. (...) You need to have permits”* (information from interview). And the same goes to Frontex’s operations as well.

5.2.2. Search and Rescue (SAR) activities in the Aegean Sea

a. SAR at Sea

As stated in the Annex to the Amendments to the International Convention on maritime search and rescue of 27 April 1979 (UN, 1979), the term Search and Rescue (SAR) refers to “the performance of distress monitoring, communication, coordination and search and rescue functions, including provision of medical advice, initial medical assistance, or medical evacuation, through the use of public and private resources including cooperating aircraft, vessels and other craft and installations” (Chapter 1, section 1.3, para. 3). Moreover, person in distress refers to “a situation wherein there is a reasonable certainty that a person, a vessel or other craft is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance” (Annex to the Amendments to the International Convention on maritime search and rescue of 27 April 1979, Ch. 1, section 1.3, para. 13).

The International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) adopted in 1979, has divided the “world’s oceans into 13 search and rescue areas, in each of which the countries concerned have delimited search and rescue regions for which they are responsible” (IMO, 2017). “These areas or regions show the nation or rescue coordination centre responsible for coordinating distress emergencies which occur in these areas” (EPSC, 2017, p. 10).

The Convention obliges all State parties to “ensure that assistance be provided to any person in distress at sea. They shall do so regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstance in which that person is found” (Chapter 2, para. 2.1.10).

b. Frontex's role in SAR

Frontex initially lacked the mandate to execute search and rescue operations at sea. However, considering the increasing maritime migration via risky routes, Frontex has become more and more active in search and rescue (SAR) operations at sea (European Commission, 2016). Indeed, with its new coast guard functions, Frontex plays now an increasingly important role in maritime border regions in Europe like for instance in the Aegean Sea (European Commission, 2016).

As also highlighted in one of the interviews, *“each country have to be responsible for search and rescue in their region. (...) So basically, whenever you have a statement of emergency in waters between Turkey and Greece, depending on where that position is, it is either the Turkish government and the Turkish Coast Guard or either the Greek government and the Greek Coast Guard to make sure they are ‘rescued’”* (information from interview).

Upon the request of Member States, the Agency is employed in maritime/ coastal borders to conduct, among others, search and rescue operations at sea. Thus, like any other vessel operating at sea, the Agency must provide SAR at sea to ‘persons in distress’.

As explained by Frontex (2014), *“When facing, in the course of a sea operation, a situation of uncertainty, alert or distress as regards a vessel or any person on board, the participating units shall consider and promptly forward as soon as possible all available information to the Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) responsible for the search and rescue region in which the situation occurs”* (Frontex, 2014, p. 14).

In 2015, every migrant boat in the Aegean Sea needed assistance or needed to be rescued. Frontex ships are all subject to SAR at sea and have to respect the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and SAR Conventions. The respondents both however have highlighted that SAR activities and Frontex by itself cannot be considered as a ‘solution’.

Chapter 6. Frontex and migration in the Aegean Sea

In this chapter, I shall proceed to the analysis and discussion of my findings. Migration is a highly politicized and extremely timely topic not only in Europe but also in other parts of the world. To make sense of the data and information gathered, this chapter takes as a starting point the literature on *securitization theory* as well as on the *social construction of security threats*. The securitization theory is employed to understand how issues such as migration become constructed as security threat in the EU. Also, we are interested in analyzing the role of Frontex in the EU's response to what is considered as both a humanitarian crisis and a border management challenge.

6.1. Nexus between migration and security

The starting point of this section is that the securitization framework can to some extent illustrate how security threats are constructed in Europe. As stated by Waever (2000) securitization is the process in which: *“a securitizing actor designates a threat to a specified referent object and declares an existential threat implying a right to use extraordinary means to fence it off”* (p. 251). Moreover, the issue is ‘successfully’ securitized when *“the relevant audience accepts this claim and thus grants to the actor a right to violate rules that otherwise would bind”* (Waever, 2000, p. 251).

International migration is not a new phenomenon, nevertheless the arrival of unprecedented number of migrants and refugees in Europe via land and sea borders, has triggered an emergency-driven response from the EU. 2015 and 2016 have been the ‘deadliest years’ so far for migrants and refugees trying to come to Europe. And images of people on overcrowded dinghy boats perilously trying to reach the shores of Europe, have become symbols of the so-called European migration ‘crisis’. These images have contributed in the representation of migration as a security threat. Indeed, in recent years, we have witnessed an increasing association of migration to security issues.

What emerges from one of my interviews (R1) is that: *“everything becomes a political thing when it is enough of people involved. Or if it is something that affects a lot of people, or becomes a ‘hot topic’. The refugee situation is such a thing”*.

Various scholars have highlighted the increasing interlink between migration and *invasion*, *threat* and *crisis* rhetoric in Europe. This was particularly visible in 2015 when we look at the EU’s response to the migratory pressures at the external borders of the EU. Instead of trying to find a common and effective response, increasing focus was put on the need to control and to ensure the surveillance of the borders.

The influx of migrants and refugees in Europe between 2015 and 2016, without doubt represents a ‘crisis’ to Europe. Migration is presented in the EU official documents, as a *challenge* and *crisis*. “These representations in turn served to justify the denial of entry (...), in part achieved through deploying military personnel” (McDonald, 2013, p. 74).

Specifically, in recent years, migration is referred to as ‘crisis’, ‘flow’, ‘flood’, ‘invasion’, ‘crisis’, ‘border control’, ‘security’ surrounding it. The need to identify over-stayers, the need to prevent undocumented border crossings, prevent people crossing borders without entry documents or with falsified documents are highlighted.

As stated by the European Commissioner responsible for Migration and Security, Avramopoulos, “security is at the very top not only of the European, but also of the global policy agenda. Along with migration, it is also among the top concerns of European citizens today” (European Commission, 2017). Mr. Avramopoulos goes on by stating that *“while not necessarily connected, both issues, especially migration and security, are today putting in question the very fundamentals and cohesion of our European Union: our unity”* (European Commission, 2017).

The securitization of migration (presentation of migration as a security issue and community matter) enabled the EU to present migration as a ‘common’ threat which requires urgent measures to tackle the issue, but also coordinated actions from the Member States.

At the first Athens security symposium: “Building a Security Union in Europe, and a global security role for Europe in the world” (in December 2017), Mr. Avramopoulos stated: *“Today’s security environment is volatile and unpredictable. There are different factors that*

can create insecurity: regional conflicts, economic instability, sectarianism, violent extremism but also poverty, demography and climate change. What is common among these threats is that they don't stop at national borders" (European Commission, 2017).

And he goes on by stating that: *"our Member States have the primary responsibility for their security. But it is clear, (...), that one single Member State simply cannot address these multi-dimensional threats on its own (...). This is why security is at the heart of the European Union's primary mission: to create a Europe that protects"* (European Commission, 2017).

Moreover, as stated in the EPSC Strategic Notes produced by the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC) the European Commission's' think thank (2017), "controlling and reducing irregular flows is a political priority". Moreover, the extreme politicization of migration and the use of 'emergency frame' to tackle migration via the Sea has further enhanced the use of 'security model' in Europe. Thus, considering the increasing threat posed by non-traditional security threats like migrations demands the coordination and cooperation among the various actors (public and private, NGOs...). An increased focus has been put upon stronger border control, tighter control of sea borders.

This situation spawned by the influx of migrants and refugees in Europe was used to justify the employment of 'extraordinary' measures such as the re-imposition of border checks in some EU Member States and to tighten border controls at the external borders of the EU. Indeed, to preserve the free movement within the Schengen area, protecting and securing the external borders of the EU are presented as being necessary and crucial (Frontex, 2017).

Considering this, as the findings have shown, the EU's border management 'industry' has considerably evolved. Indeed, the emergency frame "in repeatedly presenting the migratory situation as an 'unprecedented crisis', enables a two-faced reactive response of 'humanitarian' action and more policing" (Andersson, 2016, p. 1061). This emergency frame and extreme focus on security and border control has contributed to the toughening of border controls, land, air and coastal borders, to deter people from coming.

6.2. Stricter control and protection of the EU's external borders

Now the aim is to analyze to what extent the securitization is reflected in the instruments and tools employed by the EU. And the questions which rise here, are whether the development towards the common EBCG and Frontex can be seen as a security policy strategy? Indeed, should Frontex be perceived as the outcome of 'securitization', a 'tool' of securitization? Or should Frontex rather be perceived as a 'securitizing' actor itself?

In this research, fear of instability and loss of control over the external borders are assumed to be most important explanations as to why migration has become a securitized issue on the European agenda. One could also argue that with the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) and Frontex are part of the 'urgent' measures taken by the EU to deal with migratory challenges at the external borders of the EU. Indeed, both the EBCG and the new Frontex agency have been launched in less than a year after their proposal.

Indeed, this research argues that the creation of the new EBCG and Frontex can be perceived as being part of the 'outcome' of securitization put forward by the EU. Indeed, they have been developed with the aim to respond to these new security challenges.

The strong involvement of Frontex (deployment of Frontex officers in Greece) and the EU-Turkey Agreement have had 'concrete' results regarding the decrease of migrants coming by Sea. Indeed, as stated in *Regulation (EU) 2016/1624*, the Agency has been: "*successful in assisting Member States with implementing the operational aspects of external border management through joint operations and rapid border intervention, risk analysis, information exchange, relation with third countries and the return of returnees*" (para. 9).

Key priority of the Agency is to ensure protection of the EU's border through the implementation of enhanced border management and border patrolling activities besides systematic registration, fingerprinting of all migrants, and systematic security checks. Indeed, one could argue that Frontex (as result of securitization) has seen its capacities increase.

One could also argue that Frontex has become a securitizing actor itself in the sense that it further reinforces the threat and emergency frames in Europe. Indeed, the high interlink

between migration and threat/ risk rhetoric and discourses have enabled the Agency to become a crucial actor in the European IBM.

Even though, Frontex is represented just as a ‘tool’, it is important to highlight that the agency is participating actively in the border industry. One of the main tasks of the Agency is to conduct ‘risk analysis’ to provide overview on situation at borders. Through its ‘risk analysis’ for instance, the Agency can represent certain issues such as migration as a ‘risk’. Thus, the Agency’s work focuses on the analysis of risks represented by migration and other issues and to develop the appropriate strategies to prevent undocumented migration to Europe and to stop cross-border criminal activities.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

To conclude, regarding the research question *How does the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) operate in the Aegean Sea?*, this research has provided a detailed, though not exhaustive, analysis of Frontex's new mandate, activities and operations at sea. Frontex has emerged as a powerful tool in the EU's field of border management. Indeed, it has been created to ensure the protection of the common external borders of the EU and to assist the frontline member states like Greece.

In regards to the question *How does Frontex contribute to the effective management of migration and ensure the security of the external borders of the EU?* It should be highlighted that the EU's responses seem to be torn between two conflicting agendas. On one hand, it attempts to restrict the entry of undocumented migrants by reinforcing border controls at the external borders of the EU. But on the other hand, it tries to build a European society built on democracy, the rule of law, respect of human rights and civil liberties.

From a theoretical perspective, holding that the perception of *security* and *threat* is constructed, this thesis has sought to analyze the nexus between migration, border control and security in Europe. Moreover, this research discusses to which extent the development of the Frontex can be interpreted as a 'security policy strategy'. It is evident that in recent years, the EU has put increasing emphasis on securing the EU and its citizens through enhanced border control. The uncontrolled mass migration has been constructed into a common security concern. This is partly due the nature of arrivals, primarily through the sea, which have contributed to the feeling of emergency, loss of control over the borders to mention a few.

In overall, using the securitization theory has been very insightful. Nevertheless, it should be noted that like many other theories, securitization theory provides a very restricted understanding of the problematic. Thus, this research has only scratching the surface of this extremely complex topic of migration, security and border control in Europe.

Therefore, further research is highly needed in order to provide a more thorough understanding of this issue. Moreover, applying the notion of 'human security' might also bring some interesting discussions as well.

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