Eline Wærp

The Age of Frontex

Banal Securitization and its Normalization in EUropean External(ized) Border Control
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The Age of Frontex: Banal Securitization and its Normalization in EUropean External(ized) Border Control

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By Eline Wærp

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Malmö University
Department of Global Political Studies

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The Department of Global Political Studies, Faculty of Culture and Society, Malmö University, is an interdisciplinary department with research on politics, power relations and the construction of identity in local, national, international, and global contexts. It currently offers two doctoral programmes – Global Politics and International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER) – that play a central role in the intertwined research environment at the department.

The series Malmö Studies in International Migration and Ethnic Relations started in 2004 and comprised 10 doctoral dissertations completed at Malmö University (then Malmö högskola) until 2014. When IMER became an independent subject of education on doctoral level at the Department of Global Political Studies, six dissertations in IMER were published in the Dissertation Series in Migration, Urbanisation, and Societal Change (MUSA) 2016–2020 (see the list below). From 2023 on, dissertations in IMER are again published in the series Malmö Studies in International Migration and Ethnic Relations.

- Carin Björggren Cuadra, *Tandhygienisters arbete med patienter i ett mångkulturellt samhälle – en studie av migrationsrelaterade frågeställningar och samtal*. IMER and the Faculty of Odontology at Malmö University (Malmö högskola) with Arbetslivsinstitutet Syd Malmö, 2005.
• Caroline Adolfsson, *We don't use the word race*: Boundaries of in-group membership in Sweden, Malmö University, 2024.

• Eline Waerp, *The Age of Frontex: Banal Securitization and its Normalization in EUropean External(ized) Border Control*, Malmö University, 2024.

This publication is also available at:
mau.diva-portal.org
To Odin and Pus,

May everyone be able to move around as freely as you do.
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Newton once said that “if I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”. This dissertation is the result of not only the great ideas of those who came before me but of those who surrounded me during the last few years in Malmö. First and foremost are my supervisors, Christina Johansson and Daniela DeBono, who have provided me with unrelenting support since the very beginning and all the way until the end. Christina, you have always had an eye for both the larger picture and the details, forcing me to think about what I am actually interested in and to formulate that clearly. Your focus on the ‘red thread’ through the dissertation and the connection between the theory, method, and analysis has made it comprehensible to others beside me as well. This has been complemented by Daniela’s astute conceptual and empirical observations. Daniela, you have been my foot in the door to the rapidly developing literature in this field, and your always up-to-date knowledge on Frontex has been invaluable. The close readings and critical comments from both of you have made the dissertation what it is today. Thank you!

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Eline Wærp, April 2024
This dissertation examines how migration has become securitized in what I term the field of EUropean external(ized) border control and how this securitization has become increasingly normalized. It does so by focusing on the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency’s (Frontex) risk analysis reports in constructing migration as a security threat. Although framed as an apolitical and objective overview of the situation at the external(ized) border, I conceptualize these reports as constituting a particular form of knowledge with securitized ontological and epistemological assumptions, which preclude alternative framings of irregularized migration. By drawing on critical discourse analysis, I interrogate how this border knowledge securitizes migration in both banal and explicit ways, normalizes crises, and portrays border control as humanitarian. Interviews with civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and European Commission officials were conducted to analyze how they resist or reproduce this securitization, which is taken as indicative of its normalization. The dissertation aims to question the taken-for-grantedness of treating unwanted migration as a security issue in this field and draws attention to its harmful effects for refugees and migrants who try to cross increasingly inaccessible borders.

SAMMENDRAG
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFIC</td>
<td>Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFSJ</td>
<td>Area of Freedom, Security and Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCP</td>
<td>Border Crossing Point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEAS</td>
<td>The Common European Asylum System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Consultative Forum (to Frontex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIRAM</td>
<td>Frontex’s Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJEU</td>
<td>Court of Justice of the European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoE</td>
<td>Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>Council of the European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSDP</td>
<td>Common Security and Defense Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG Home</td>
<td>European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTM</td>
<td>IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EaP</td>
<td>Eastern Partnership Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EASO</td>
<td>European Asylum Support Office, now EUAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBCGA</td>
<td>European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECRE</td>
<td>European Council on Refugees and Exiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECHR</td>
<td>European Court of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EEAS</td>
<td>EU External Action Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td>Entry/Exit System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETIAS</td>
<td>European Travel Information and Authorisation System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUAA</td>
<td>The European Union Agency for Asylum (formerly EASO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eu-LISA</td>
<td>The European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUNAVFOR MED</td>
<td>The European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation IRINI (formerly Sophia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurodac</td>
<td>European Dactyloscopy (fingerprint database for asylum-seekers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europol</td>
<td>The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosur</td>
<td>The European Border Surveillance System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRA</td>
<td>European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAN</td>
<td>Frontex Risk Analysis Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRO</td>
<td>Fundamental Rights Officer (Frontex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMDAC</td>
<td>IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>Integrated Border Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHA</td>
<td>Justice and Home Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JO</td>
<td>Joint Operation (between Frontex and a member state/SAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBE Committee</td>
<td>European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODIHR</td>
<td>Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Schengen Associated Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>Search and Rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBC</td>
<td>Schengen Borders Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIFA</td>
<td>Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (in the Council JHA configuration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIR</td>
<td>Serious Incident Report (Frontex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIS I/II</td>
<td>Schengen Information System I/II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEU and TFEU</td>
<td>Treaty on European Union and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, together constituting “the Treaties” on which the EU is founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIS</td>
<td>The EU’s Visa Information System</td>
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This dissertation’s perhaps unconventional inspiration was Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865/1998) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872/1998). These works from the literary nonsense genre helped me to see the absurd and inverted logics characterizing the field of EUropean external(ized) border control in which migration is framed as always risky, crises are normal, and border control is somehow humanitarian. Alice’s dream worlds illustrate how ‘common sense’ is situational, with “digging for apples” making just as much sense in Wonderland (Carroll, 1865/1998, p. 34) as non-rescue does in EUropean external(ized) border control. I was also inspired by research on the banal, which first led me to Hannah Arendt’s (1965/2006) notion of the “banality of evil”, which she developed to explain how harmful acts can take on a banal form and become routinized within the workings of the state. Her work has seen controversy, however, which led me to Michael Billig’s (1995) “banal nationalism” instead, which inspired the term banal securitization.

Unlike for Carroll, the ideas for the dissertation did not present themselves one “golden afternoon” (Carroll, 1865/1998, p. 5) but were born out of what I found to be conflicting discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism used by EUropean policymakers and Frontex to justify exclusionary border controls. My interest in this topic was sparked following what has become known as the 2015 ‘migration crisis’, stumbling upon literature in critical border and migration studies on humanitarian borderwork (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Williams, 2016), and the ways in which elements of
both care and control are present in these interventions at Europe’s sea and land borders (Campesi, 2014; Cusumano, 2019; Cuttitta, 2014; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2018). I was perplexed to read how Europe’s militarized border control operations – deployed in response to the largest refugee movements since WWII at the time – were framed as being in the ‘best interest’ of the refugees and migrants themselves. This seemed absurd to me, and got me interested in how such an everyday occurrence and intrinsic part of human history like mobility could be seen as so dangerous that walls that had been torn down after two world wars had to be resurrected. My interest in the legitimizing effects of discourse on practices steered me in the direction of the agency at the heart of Europe’s external(ized) border control, Frontex, and its role in discursively securitizing migration. The first step then became to analyze how Frontex does so through its production of risk analyses, and the second step to examine whether this securitization is normalized among other actors in this field as well.

Thus, much like Alice’s encounter with Wonderland, my first encounter with the field of Europe’s external(ized) border control was one of discomfort, as I struggled to understand the de-humanizing responses towards people fleeing war and poverty. Just like things are done the other way around in Carroll’s fictional worlds (such as the Queen of Hearts’ insistence on “sentence first, verdict later”) and the explanations that are given do not always make sense, I found the same to be the case in this field and Frontex’s border knowledge. Whereas Alice tries to find meaning in Wonderland, I have tried to understand how security is construed as more meaningful than human lives in Europe’s external(ized) border control. Perhaps it would have been easier to follow the King’s advise, that “if there is no meaning in it… that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn’t try to find any” (Carroll, 1865/1998, p. 106, emphases added). But to resort to nihilism is not very useful either.

Frontex’s framing of its risk analyses as apolitical and technical is precisely what makes them important documents to study, since they are underpinned by a securitized ontology and epistemology, influencing policies and responses on the ground. Interrogating the banal securitization of migration and its increased normalization is thus necessary in order to disrupt its dominance and taken-for-grantedness, which is important since it has devastating consequences for the lives of tens if not hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants who try to traverse Europe’s fortified borders every year. And so we venture down the rabbit hole to explore the discourses and practices shaping this field and the knowledge that governs it.
1) INTRODUCTION

If everybody moves, when does movement become migration, whose movement counts as migration and why? (Anderson, 2019, p. 2, emphases added).

On October 3, 2013, a boat with over 500 refugees and migrants shipwrecked off the coast of the Italian island Lampedusa. More than 360 were later confirmed dead, with the rest reported as missing (Russell & DeBono, 2013). This became known as the Lampedusa tragedy, which sparked promises of ‘never again’ among EUropean policymakers, with Italy launching a naval operation to save lives in the Mediterranean (Mainwaring, 2019). Only months away from the ten-year commemoration of the shipwreck, another boat with 750 people onboard went down in the Greek search and rescue (SAR) region. Only 100 were rescued, by a private yacht, in what has been called the deadliest shipwreck in recent history. The Greek coast guard was accused of capsizing the overcrowded boat by attempting to tow it, while Frontex was criticized for yet again not doing enough to prevent the loss of lives after spotting the boat hours in advance (Davey-Attlee, Labropoulou, Karadsheh, Mezzofiore & Polglase, 2023; Beake & Kallergis, 2023; New York Times, 2023). In between these two disasters, as well as before and after, shipwrecks have continued to occur at EUrope’s sea borders (IOM, 2023a, 2023b). The questions of how this can be tolerable for EUropean policymakers and publics, as well as why people are dying at EUrope’s borders, are pressing. This dissertation contributes with a partial answer to these questions: because of the securitization of migration, that is, the framing of migration as a security threat.

1 This is used as an umbrella term to refer to both EU member states and Schengen Associated Countries (SACs), the latter of which are not part of the EU (see Stierl, 2016).
The dissertation is situated within critical border and migration studies, drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), interviews, and participant observation; along with the Paris School of security studies (Bigo, 2002) and the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). The methodology and theoretical framework share a similar ontology and epistemology, with CDA and securitization theory both being concerned with the ability of language to exert power and to interrogate naturalized assumptions (Fairclough, 2015). In the first part of the dissertation, I examine the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA), Frontex, in both securitizing migration and normalizing this securitization. Situating Frontex in the larger field of European external(ized) border control, I analyze how this securitization takes place in both banal and explicit ways in Frontex’s risk analysis reports, which I conceptualize as constituting a specific form of border knowledge with its own ontology and epistemology. I do so by identifying themes in the reports within which Frontex constructs risk, crisis, and humanitarianism, along with examining how the discursive practices that Frontex draws on enables it to securitize migration. I also examine how the different reports draw on each other to accumulate crises, and how Frontex fuses security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses in order to portray increased border controls in response to suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border as ‘commonsensical’ – which serves to normalize securitization.3

The second part of the dissertation examines whether this securitization is normalized among key actors in this field. Although the main focus is on Frontex, the notion of field opens for analysis of the discursive struggles between civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials and how they negotiate the dominating discourses and practices in this field. By drawing on Fairclough’s (2015) three-dimensional model, I thus analyze not only the production of securitization by Frontex but also its reception by relevant actors. This is in line with the Copenhagen School’s emphasis on the role of the audience in accepting “securitizing moves” in order for them to be successful (Buzan et al., 1998). To analyze securitization’s normalization, I draw on Fairclough’s (2015) notions of “naturalization of discourse” and the “generation of hegemonic

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2 This term is used to highlight the fact that the EUropean external border is not confined to the territorial borderline itself but increasingly seeps into third countries as well (see Shachar, 2020). The term ‘external’ is also used to distinguish the focus from internal border controls. Since border control is a shared competence between the EU and member states it would be reductionist to refer to it as ‘EU border control’ but also inaccurate to call it ‘European border control’, as that would ignore the supranational role of the EU in this policy area.

3 See Silberstein (2020) for an analysis of Frontex’s “representational practices” in normalization.
common sense”, along with Buzan et al.’s (1998) “institutionalization of securitization”, understanding the lack of counter discourses and resistance as being indicative of normalization. By combining securitization theory with Billig’s (1995) notion of “banal nationalism”, I advance the notion of banal securitization to capture how securitization occurs not only through dramatized speech acts (Buzan et al., 1998) but also through more mundane day-to-day practices by bureaucrats (Bigo, 2002), such as the Frontex and DG Home officials. This theoretical framework allows me to transcend the norm/exception binary in the securitization literature and focus on how securitization takes place through both discourse and practices, which will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the securitization of migration in this field than has been achieved before.

While Frontex’s operations have received increased scholarly attention following its rapid growth over the last two decades (Léonard, 2010; Neal, 2009; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), its less conspicuous role as a knowledge producer has not received commensurate attention. This is an important research gap since Frontex’s risk analyses provide the evidence base for strategic, budgetary, and operational decisions in European external(ized) border control (Campesi, 2022; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2017), which have consequences for refugees and migrants who try to cross increasingly inaccessible borders. With its focus on Frontex’s border knowledge, this dissertation thus brings a critical constructivist perspective to the analysis of the EU’s most rapidly expanding agency and contributes both theoretically and empirically to migration studies (also known as IMER). But first, some background context is necessary to understand how securitization and Frontex became Europe’s default response to irregularized migration.4

4 Inverted commas around the term ‘irregular’ or the term ‘irregularized migration’ is used to highlight the political, bureaucratic, and legal processes involved in categorizing refugees and migrants as ‘irregular’, while being mindful of their limited options of regular arrival (De Genova, 2002, 2013a; Düvell, 2011).
Background Context

The 2015 ‘Migration Crisis’ and the Securitization of Migration

Migration and security issues are intrinsically linked in western politics.
(Hellström, 2015, p. 29, emphasis added)

How is it that with the unprecedented number of displaced persons worldwide, EUropean member states’ response has been to frame those who come through irregular routes to EUrope as opportunity seekers or security threats? In this context, why did Frontex become the largest EU agency instead of the European Asylum Agency (EUAA)? How can racism and xenophobia be on the rise again within the lifetime of Holocaust survivors? How should we understand EUrope closing its borders and making asylum more difficult to access in response to proliferating protracted refugee situations (UNHCR, 2020)? How do we explain EUropean policymakers’ knee-jerk reactions to protect the borders rather than the people crossing them? Why is “immigration always seen as problematic”? (Bigo, 2002, p. 71, emphasis added). And, as Carens (1987, p. 251) asked more than three decades ago, how do we make sense of the fact that it is normal that “borders have guards and the guards have guns” that they point at innocent people? While the dissertation does not promise to answer these large questions, they do inform its aspiration to shed light on how migration has become not only securitized but how this securitization has become seemingly normalized in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control.

Following the end of the Cold War and after the terrorist attacks in EUrope in the early 2000s, migration has increasingly been linked with crime, terrorism, and security threats (Buzan et al., 1998; Guild, 2009; Huysmans, 2000). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which stoked Western European states’ fears of mass movements of refugees and migrants from the former communist bloc, was a turning point in the perception of migration in a securitarian framework (Ferreira, 2019; Huysmans, 2006). States’ security agendas widened in the absence of the threat of nuclear war between superpowers and came to include societal, political, and human security (Buzan et al., 1998). New threat perceptions emerged with globalization and increased international mobility, with transnational crime,

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5 The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has seen a sharp increase in the last two decades, from approximately 35 million in the late 1990s to around 40 million in the 2000s, before rising to 51.2 million in 2013, 65.3 million in 2015, 82.4 million in 2019, and over 100 million in 2022 (UNHCR, 2011, 2016a, 2021, 2022a).
human trafficking, and smuggling prompting security concerns to take center stage in Western societies (Ferreira, 2019, p. 32). Hellström (2006, p. 169) points out that the construction of external threats has been central to the European identity project: “there cannot be a ‘we’ without the presence of a ‘them’ that, somehow, displays what is not part of ‘us’”. It is in this context that “the term migrant… by definition [becomes] seen as something destructive” (Bigo, 2002, p. 67, emphasis in original), threatening the territorial boundaries of the state and those who are inside them. As Billig (1995, p. 142) noted at the time, “‘Fortress Europe’ is being constructed in order to keep at bay… the non-Christian, non-European… world”, which is accompanied by a “banal discourse of borders and migration” that justifies exclusion to protect ‘our’ society.

De Haas, Castles, and Miller (2020, p. 243) describe the 1990s as a period of “anti-refugee politics”, with European states scrambling to find ways to prevent the anticipated mass arrivals, which, in the end, never took place. These concerns prompted an increased politicization of migration, accompanied by the rise of right-wing extremists and the introduction of non-arrival policies for asylum-seekers, including restrictive interpretations of the 1951 Refugee Convention and efforts to step up returns (De Haas et al., 2020, pp. 243–244). Securitization has taken hold despite refugees and migrants’ positive contributions to host states’ economies, labor markets, and demographics, with the focus rather being placed on the difficulties of integration and the perceived “mismatch” between the culture and religion of the newcomers vis-à-vis the natives (De Haas et al., p. 33; Düvell, 2011; Goodman, 2018). The fear of ‘hordes’ of irregularized migrants has continued into recent times despite the fact that irregularized border crossings constitute a fraction of the total number of border crossings into Europe, most of which take place at the air borders rather than the sea and land borders (Düvell, 2011; Frontex, 2021; Jeandesboz, 2020).

Scholars have pointed out, however, that policymakers and security professionals have a role in both constructing and exaggerating these fears by linking them directly to their “own immediate interests (competition for budgets and missions)” (Bigo, 2002, p. 64). Despite critical voices from both academia and civil society, this “security prism” (Bigo, 2002, p. 63) has taken hold, leading to the erosion of fundamental rights due to extraordinary measures that are justified by the invocation of a constant state of emergency at the borders in response to the perceived threat of migration (Buzan et al., 1998; Perkowski, Stierl & Burridge, 2023). This has resulted in a decrease of safe and legal routes for refugees and migrants to enter Europe, as strict visa policies and carrier sanctions for commercial transporters have been introduced (Andersson, 2016;
Düvell, 2011). The securitization of migration has thus created exclusionary and dangerous border spaces, as refugees and migrants are left with few other options than entering in ‘irregular’ ways aided by smugglers (Andersson, 2017b; Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016). As a result, an estimated 90% of those granted protection in EUrope arrived ‘irregularly’ (European Parliament, 2018a, p. 4).

The deadly consequences of securitization are epitomized by the 2015 ‘migration crisis’, when approximately one million people crossed the Mediterranean Sea to get to EUrope (UNHCR, 2016b), with media reports of crowded boats capsizing or being “left to die” (Forensic Architecture, 2016; Mainwaring, 2019; Squire, 2017). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that between 2014–2023, a minimum of 28,000 refugees and migrants have lost their lives or went missing in the Mediterranean (IOM, 2023a), with the Central Mediterranean being the deadliest migration route in the world (see Figures 1 and 2). UNHCR (2016b) estimated the likelihood of dying on this route as 1 in 88 in 2016 and 1 in 47 between Libya and Italy, with 2016 being a record-high year with 5000 reported deaths (IOM, 2023a). Although the ‘migration crisis’ is generally dated to 2015 because of the spike in arrivals (Fox, 2019), mortality rates in the Mediterranean have increased since then despite the lower number of arrivals (see Figure 3), which probes the question: a crisis for whom?

These deaths thus take place against the backdrop of increasingly restrictive border controls and migration and asylum policies among EUropean member states, and are not inevitable. Nevertheless, the 2015 ‘crisis’ was largely framed by EUropean policymakers as a security crisis rather than a humanitarian one, a threat to the integrity of the union’s external(ized) border and the safety of EUropean citizens (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014, 2016). As Buzan et al. (1998, p. 18, emphases added) underline, “in the process of securitization, the key issue is for whom security becomes a consideration in relation to whom”. In this context, the actor deemed most appropriate to deal with irregularized migration became Frontex.7

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6 I generally refer to the terms ‘crisis’ and ‘migration crisis’ in inverted commas to highlight their discursive construction and to avoid reifying them. This is not to deny the lived experiences of refugees and migrants but to problematize their political use.

7 This was confirmed by Frontex officials, who pointed out that EUrope’s response to the 2015 ‘crisis’ was “Frontex, Frontex, Frontex” (interview 15/7/2021), prompting the 2016 and 2019 regulations (Campesi, 2022; Fjortoft, 2022; Perkowski et al., 2023).
Figure 1: Migrant deaths worldwide (IOM, 2023b).

Figure 2: Migrant deaths in the Mediterranean (IOM, 2023a).

Figure 3: Mortality rates in the Mediterranean, 2015–19 (IOM, 2020).
Frontex to the Rescue?

Established by Council Regulation (EC) 2007/2004 in 2004 as the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the EU, Frontex’s main task is to “protect” Europe’s external border (Frontex, 2018a). Its mandate has been expanded several times since, including immediately following the 2015 ‘crisis’, to “regain control of the EU’s external borders” and “save Schengen” (Council, 2016), as stated by then President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. Being one of several EU agencies in the so-called area of freedom, security and justice (AFSJ), Frontex has faced criticism since its first operation off the West African coast, being accused by civil society actors of turning a blind eye to fundamental rights violations in member states where it operates (HRW 2021; interviews 11/3/2020, 5/2/2020) and being complicit in push and pullbacks at the external(ized) border (BVMN 2020; Waters, Freudenthal & Williams, 2020), thus contributing to making it a “site of suffering and death” (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016, p. 318).8

In 2011, a Human Rights Watch report entitled “The EU’s Dirty Hands” criticized Frontex for assisting Greek authorities in detaining 12,000 refugees and migrants in overcrowded detention centers (HRW, 2011) despite rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) that they did not meet minimum fundamental rights standards (ECtHR, 2011; Trauner, 2016). In response to the report, Frontex stressed that it is not responsible for “detention on the territory of the Member State” and that it had “been expected to operate in an exceptional environment” with a high number of arrivals (Frontex, 2011b, para. 2-3, emphasis added). Less than ten years later, Frontex became embroiled in the largest pushback accusations against the agency to date, when investigative journalists revealed systematic pushbacks carried out by the Greek coast guard in the Aegean Sea under the auspices of Frontex’s Operation Poseidon (Christides, van Dijken, Lüdke & Popp, 2021; Waters, Freudenthal & Williams, 2020). The Executive Director denied the allegations until the EU’s anti-fraud office, OLAF, found

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8 Pushbacks refer to the practice of pushing refugees and migrants back from the border without assessing their protection needs. In legal terms this is known as “mass expulsions”, “collective expulsion”, “summary returns”, or “hot returns” (Moreno-Lax, 2017; Shachar, 2020). On the other hand, pullbacks refer to the prevention of departure, where refugees and migrants are prevented from exiting a state by being pulled back by the border or coast guard. Both practices are deemed to be in violation of the 1951 Refugee Convention’s right to asylum and principle of non-refoulement.
evidence of senior level knowledge and cover-up, whereupon he resigned (Barigazzi & Lynch, 2022; Christides & Lüdke, 2022).

Since the mid-2010s, however, Frontex and the EU at large have increasingly attempted to frame border control as humanitarian (Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Campesi, 2014; Nazarewicz, 2017), which is illustrated by the increased focus on fundamental rights and search and rescue (SAR) in Frontex’s more recent regulations, public communication, and risk analysis reports (Campesi, 2022; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017; interviews 2/3/21, 8/3/21, 15/3/21, 17/3/21). This prompted the emergence of literature on humanitarian borderwork, which points to the emptiness of this discourse and lack of a humanitarian response to irregularized migration (Cuttitta, 2014; Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Williams, 2016). This literature has shed light on an inherent paradox in humanitarian border control – the “paradox of protection” (Bigo, 2006) or “care and control duality” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) – which arises from the dual task of protecting the borders from refugees and migrants while, at the same time, protecting the latter from dangerous situations created by border controls. Frontex’s invocation of a humanitarian discourse thus seems to be a conscious strategy to legitimize its work in times of mounting pressure for more accountability and transparency in its operations rather than an actual change in its practices.

This demonstrates the need to interrogate Frontex’s particular border knowledge, since it influences both high-level strategic and operational decisions on the ground (Campesi, 2022; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2017) and refugees and migrants’ mobility opportunities and lives. This is important since “Frontex’s more profound, yet less visible role is in… developing the concepts, vocabulary and technoscientific and bureaucratic knowledge subsequently disseminated and promoted” (Follis, 2018, p. 216, emphases added) in this field, which securitizes migration and distracts from alternative responses to irregularized migration. Just as states have the capacity “to impose themselves as a frame of mind” (Bigo, 2002, p. 67; cf. Billig, 1995), so does Frontex’s border knowledge. Frontex is not the only securitizing actor in European external(ized) border control, however. As Bigo (2002, p. 63, emphases added) points out, securitization’s

Popularity… is not an expression of traditional responses to a rise of insecurity, crime, [and] terrorism… it is the creation of a continuum of threats and general unease in which many different actors exchange their fears and beliefs in the

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9 I use ‘humanitarian border control’ as an umbrella term for similar terms found in the literature.
process of making a risky and dangerous society.

Thus, I focus not only on Frontex’s discursive construction of migration as a ‘security threat’ but also that of other influential actors in this field, including civil society actors, border guards, and European Commission officials in the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home).

**Research Questions and Aims**

Critical border and migration scholars have identified logics of security, crisis, and humanitarianism as characterizing EUropean external(ized) border control (e.g., Andersson, 2017b; Campesi, 2014; Cuttitta, 2014, Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Taking my starting point from this literature and the securitization of migration, I analyze how migration is securitized by Frontex and key actors in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. This includes focusing on how Frontex draws on discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism in order to justify more border controls in response to suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border, which contributes to normalizing securitization. It also involves attending to how civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials reproduce or reject these discourses, which tells us whether securitization is normalized among them (see Vollmer, 2011, for the “institutionalisation of threat”). The focus on Frontex is warranted by the increasingly powerful role it has come to play in this field in the last two decades as it expands in response to each ‘migration crisis’ (see Perkowski et al., 2023).

To take into account the context in which Frontex is situated and not treat the EU as a monolithic actor (Neal, 2009), I conceptualize EUropean external(ized) border control as a wider field in which various actors operate (cf. Bigo, Bonditti & Olsson, 2016). This opens up for analysis of the different discourses and practices these actors promulgate and engage in, as well as discursive shifts (Fairclough, 2015). Discourse is important not only in terms of how issues are perceived but also how they are dealt with. Hegemonic discourses form part of our taken for granted beliefs and, as such, they are difficult to resist, despite their often harmful effects (Fairclough, 2015). By examining how irregularized migration is portrayed in Frontex’s border knowledge, it thus becomes possible to discern what are considered to be legitimate responses to it. Questioning what is considered to be the natural order of things, such as migration posing a risk, is important since there is nothing commonsensical about ‘common sense’ (Fairclough, 2015), which means that things could always be otherwise (Potter,
As Billig (1995, p. 36) points out, our idea of a “world of nations” is a recent creation that would have seemed bizarre to people of earlier times.

The dissertation’s aims are thus two-fold: 1) theoretically, to advance the concepts of border knowledge, banal securitization, normalization of securitization, and inverted humanitarian border control; and 2) empirically, to contribute to the research gap on Frontex’s role as a knowledge producer and how key actors negotiate it. To do so, the following research questions are posed:

1) How does Frontex’s border knowledge securitize migration and normalize this securitization? What is the role of the construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism?

2) Is the securitization of migration normalized in the field of European external(ized) border control? How do civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials resist or reproduce it?

The first question is the main research question, with Frontex’s risk analysis reports constituting the primary empirical material. The second question goes beyond Frontex’s official discourse to examine whether this securitization is accepted among other actors in the field, with the interviews and fieldwork comprising the empirical material. Chapter five deals with the first research question and chapter six with the second.

Scope and Delimitations

Although this dissertation situates Frontex in the broader field of European external(ized) border control, the main emphasis is on Frontex. The focus on Frontex’s role in securitizing migration entails an emphasis on irregularized migration, since this is the risk analysis reports’ main concern. I do not provide a comprehensive analysis of Frontex’s evolution (see e.g., Léonard, 2009; Neal, 2009) nor an account of member states’ discourses or practices, except as articulated by their border and coast guards. The analysis is limited to three

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10 For example, why are migration policies situated alongside police matters under DG Home instead of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL), DG European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), DG European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), or DG International Partnerships? De Genova (2002) notes how the US Border Patrol, from its creation in 1925 until 1940, was under the Department of Labor before being moved to the Department of Justice and later Home Affairs, where it has been since 9/11 (US Customs and Border Protection, 2020).
categories of actors in this field: 1) border and coast guards seconded to Frontex operations; 2) Frontex and DG Home officials; and 3) civil society actors (understood to comprise INGOs, IOs, and NGOs).\textsuperscript{11} This delimitation excludes important actors such as refugees and migrants, members of the European Parliament, and Council members in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) configuration, but has been done in order to keep the scope of the dissertation manageable.

The EU institutional triangle and JHA agencies are central actors in EUropean external(ized) border control, although migration has become the purview of an increasing number of actors over the last decade. While DG Home is responsible for migration and border control policies in the European Commission, DG International Partnerships, DG ECHO, DG NEAR, and, most recently, DG Trade also deal with this policy area. DG International Partnerships and the EU External Action Service (EEAS) manage the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) that was created following the 2015 ‘crisis’, which finances numerous migration related projects across Africa. The EEAS is also responsible for the sprawling number of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions across Africa, the Balkans, and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, and DG NEAR oversees the largest external EU fund, the Instrument for Pre-Accession, part of which finances Western Balkan countries’ border control capacities.

Similarly, although Frontex is the main agency tasked with migration and border control it is not the only agency dealing with this issue. Others include the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), the European law enforcement agency Europol, eu-LISA\textsuperscript{12}, and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). Europol works on human trafficking and has since 2016 hosted a center on migrant smuggling; the EUAA produces important ‘asylum knowledge’ through its country of origin (COI) reports, which are aimed at streamlining member states’ asylum decisions; FRA provides fundamental rights assessments of EU policies in this field; and eu-LISA is charged with managing the proliferating information systems in the AFSJ (including the upcoming Entry/Exit System [EES] and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System [ETIAS]). Due to the nature of the research questions, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials were chosen because they are the main actors involved in EUropean

\textsuperscript{11} For the purpose of simplicity, ‘civil society’ is used as an umbrella term and may not reflect whether intergovernmental organizations (INGOs) or international organizations (IOs) see themselves as fitting into this category.

\textsuperscript{12} The European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.
external(ized) border control. Civil society actors were included to provide a broader perspective on securitization’s normalization in this field beyond these state officials. They have come to play a larger role at Europe’s borders following the 2015 ‘crisis’, providing assistance to refugees and migrants in member states’ absence and gathering data on mobility patterns in neighboring regions.

Lastly, I focus on the time period 2010–21 since this period witnessed Frontex’s rapid growth and coincides with multiple ‘migration crises’.

Definitions

This section defines how I understand the terms ‘border’ and ‘border control’. Other central concepts that are used are explained in the theoretical and methodological chapters.

Borders

In contrast to the traditional understanding of borders as the “mere geographical margins or territorial edges” of a state (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 3), I understand borders as being constructed, reproduced, and enacted by different actors (e.g., policymakers, bureaucrats, and border guards) in various contexts. Similar to Mezzadra and Neilson’s (2013) concept of “borderscape” – which emphasizes the dispersed sites, characteristics, and functions of the border – this dissertation conceptualizes borders as elastic, temporal, and shape-shifting (Shachar, 2020) and as manifesting themselves differently depending on who tries to cross them, how, and for what purposes (see Tsoni, 2019, for “affective borderscapes” in the Aegean). I thus understand there to be nothing natural about state borders, which are rather “invented and instituted through often violent historical processes”, making them sites of contestation (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 27). I further see borders as “complex social institutions… marked by tensions between practices of border reinforcement and border crossing” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013, p. 3, emphasis added), sieving out wanted from unwanted mobility (Campesi, 2022; Walters, 2006).

The dissertation situates itself within scholarship that argues that there has been a proliferation and heterogenization of borders, which has led to the peculiar situation today in which “the border is no longer at the border” (Balibar, 2002, p. 89, emphasis in original), stretching both beyond and within the lines on maps (Shachar, 2020). In Europe, this is illustrated by the externalization of border and migration control to third countries, achieved through means such as linking development aid and visa facilitation to their willingness to prevent irregularized
migration to Europe (Lember-Pedersen, 2019; Reslow, 2018). This turn from the understanding of borders as “lines in the sand” (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2014) entails moving beyond a territorialist epistemology (or “trap”, Agnew, 1994; Ruggie, 1993) that views the state as an enclosed container, thus de-centering the focus on the state and directing it towards how borders move across people rather than the other way around (Shachar, 2020). I therefore align myself with the understanding of borders as found in critical migration and border studies, which highlights their inherently exclusionary design – facilitating the mobility of designated bona fide travelers while restricting it for ‘risky Others’. This filtering mechanism is a central feature of European external(ized) border control and is sustained by Frontex’s border knowledge, as we will see.

Border Control

Similar to this conceptualization of borders, I use the term ‘border control’ to refer to the different discourses and practices that go into continuously reproducing the European external(ized) border, including through policies, risk analysis, and operational practices on the ground. Like the concept of “borderwork” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017), border control draws attention to the everyday activities of the different actors involved in “doing border” (Hess & Kasparek, 2017, p. 59). Border control thus encompasses everything from sensationalized interceptions at sea to covert pushbacks in deep woodlands; the routine screening, fingerprinting, and registering of refugees and migrants; and data gathering, statistical analysis, and predictive capabilities. Just as the border is dispersed, so is its control, stretching from before entry (visa requirements, carrier sanctions) to at the border (patrols and border checks) to after the border (monitoring of visa overstay, ‘illegal’ stay, and returns) (see Shachar, 2020). Rather than preventing crossings, border control seeks to regulate them, sifting out who can be admitted under which circumstances (Campesi, 2022; Walters, 2006). Hence, I see border control as the result of modern states’ successful “monopolization of the legitimate means of movement” (Torpey, 2018), which has become a naturalized aspect of people’s everyday lives despite its unequal consequences for mobility opportunities along the Global North-South divide.

Following my critical constructivist approach, I use the term ‘border control’ rather than the increasingly common term ‘border management’ in order to not reify the managerial terminology used by Frontex and the EU, which depoliticizes border control and obscures its discriminatory effects by presenting it as neutral and technical work (Follis, 2018). Border control, on the other hand, foregrounds states’ emphasis on security concerns. Further, the term ‘European
external(ized) border control’ draws attention to the exporting of controls to third countries and is inspired by Shachar’s (2020) notion of the “shifting border”, which refers to Western states’ moving of the border itself to prevent refugees and migrants from reaching their territory and applying for asylum, while retaining the possibility of snapping it back to the territorial frontier when needed (see also Fitzgerald, 2019; Moreno-Lax, 2017; Waerp, 2022).

Structure of the Dissertation

The first chapter provides a brief introduction to Frontex and the securitization of migration in light of the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ and presents the research questions and aims, scope and delimitations, definitions of key terms, and the structure of the dissertation. The second chapter provides an overview of the existing research in the field and the dissertation’s contributions to it, along with the theoretical and conceptual framework. The third chapter outlines the methodological framework, including the dissertation’s critical constructivist approach; the operationalization of CDA, interviews, and participant observation; and some ethical reflections. The fourth chapter historicizes the emergence of the field of European external(ized) border control and Frontex, illustrating how securitization has become institutionalized over time. The fifth chapter examines how Frontex’s border knowledge not only securitizes migration but also contributes to its normalization, focusing on the construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism. The seventh chapter shifts focus to the key actors in this field and how they both resist and reproduce securitization, the former discursively and the latter through their practices, thus unwittingly furthering securitization’s normalization in European external(ized) border control. A conclusion follows at the end.
Literature Review and Contributions

Since the 2000s, a large body of literature related to EU border control has emerged in tandem with the political salience of migration. This includes research on migration control (Geddes & Scholten, 2016; Guiraudon & Lahav, 2006); the EU’s asylum policy (Lavenex, 2018; Léonard & Kaunert, 2019); justice and home affairs (JHA) agencies (Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Carrera, den Hertog & Parkin, 2013); the development of JHA (Hansen, 2008; Ripoll Servent & Trauner, 2017); the securitization of migration (Guild, 2009; Huysmans, 2000; Léonard & Kaunert, 2020); smart borders (Jeandesboz, 2017; Martins & Jumbert, 2020; Vavoula, 2021); the political economy of border controls (Andersson, 2018; Lemberg-Pedersen, Hansen & Halpern, 2020); externalization (Reslow, 2018; Shachar, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2014); and humanitarian border control (Campesi, 2014; DeBono, 2019a; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). This dissertation situates itself within the critical constructivist camp of this literature – critical border and critical migration studies – and seeks to contribute theoretically and empirically to scholarship on Frontex, the securitization of migration, the construction of crisis and risk, and humanitarian border control.

The Securitization of Migration

The dissertation contributes to a large body of literature on the securitization of migration in the EU that has emerged over the last three decades (Bigo, 2002; Buzan et al., 1998; Guild, 2009; Huysmans, 2000; Léonard & Kaunert, 2020; van
Ekelund (2014) highlights that migration has been at the top of the EU’s agenda since the 1990s, with fears among Western member states that the 2004 enlargement to the East and South would weaken the protection of the external border. Others have questioned whether migration has become securitized in Europe at all (Boswell, 2007) or to what extent (Squire, 2015). Bigo (2013, pp. 119, 120–121) has studied the practices of “security professionals” in the field of EU (in)security, both tracing and mapping this “stock exchange of fear” by focusing on the accelerated anti-immigration discourse in Europe post-9/11, the theme of suspicion and sense of “permanent danger”, as well as the police and military’s increasing role in framing ‘security threats’. Léonard (2010) and Léonard and Kaunert (2020) have used the Paris School to analyze how Frontex’s activities amount to securitizing practices since they have traditionally been deployed in the military and intelligence fields (e.g., intelligence gathering, risk analysis, and surveillance) and by virtue of Frontex’s increased cooperation with Europol and NATO.

Chillaud (2013, p. 56, emphasis added) contends that “Frontex has become the institutional result of the association between security, migration and border controls”, while Paul (2017, p. 689, emphasis added) describes Frontex’s risk analyses as “a governmental practice in the securitization of migration”. Neal (2009, p. 334), on the other hand, argues that Frontex was not a product of securitization since its founding documents employed a “risk language” rather than a securitizing one. Vollmer (2011, pp. 319, 326, emphasis added) draws attention to the “discursive role of numbers” in securitizing migration, with European policymakers strategically using “rough estimates” based on “dubious assumptions” in order to exaggerate the number of irregularized migrants and steer policy responses. Similarly, Düvell (2011, p. 275, emphasis added) explores the paradoxical outcome of restrictive and cumbersome policies and laws in “generating” irregular migration, thus having “unintended side-effects” (see also van Liempt, Schapendonk, & Campos-Delgado, 2023).

The dissertation contributes theoretically to this literature by introducing the notions of banal securitization and its normalization, emphasizing securitization’s mundane and increasingly taken for granted form in EU external(ized) border control. It also makes an empirical contribution to the under-researched role of Frontex’s border knowledge in securitizing migration in both explicit and banal ways, along with the normalization of securitization among key actors in the field.
The Construction of Crisis and Risk

The related notions of ‘crisis’ and ‘risk’ have also spurred a large body of literature. Buzan et al. (1998) draw on Schmitt’s (2005) conceptions of “sovereign power” and “the right to decide on the exception” in developing securitization theory, while others criticize the prolonged “state of exception” (Agamben, 2005) at Europe’s external border – seemingly situated outside the reach of the law (Campesi, 2022). Agamben’s (1998) notion of “bare life” has been used to describe life in refugee camps in these spaces, while others have examined border control through Foucault’s notions of “biopolitics” and “biopower” (Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017), conceptualizing it as “necropolitics” (Mbembé & Meintjes, 2003) or “thanatopolitics” (Squire, 2017). An attendant strain of research focuses on the productive power of crisis and risk, drawing attention to their social construction and strategic use (Mainwaring, 2019; Krzyzanowski et al., 2023; Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014, 2016). Problematizing how the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ was framed as an emergency, Aas and Gundhus (2015) emphasize that 20,000 refugees and migrants have died at Europe’s borders since 1988, questioning why this is not considered a crisis by European policymakers, who do not count (nor account for) these deaths.

Similarly, Mainwaring (2019) demonstrates how Malta invoked a crisis discourse to receive funding and political concessions at the EU level, despite seeing few arrivals due to its lack of SAR operations and refusal of disembarkations. Taking issue with European policymakers’ framing of the 2011 Arab Spring as a ‘migration crisis’, Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2014, p. 117, emphasis added) contrast this with Frontex’s managerial approach, illustrating how “the spectacular nature of crisis labeling… masks the everyday… bureaucratic forms of control that have been built up over time”. Despite calling for an “immediate response thought to be outside of politics”, they contend that crises are produced by the surrounding political environment (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins 2016, p. 318). Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2016, pp. 316–17, emphasis added) thus understand crisis and routine as relational, with crisis not only producing exceptional policies but also furthering “pre-existing migration control practices and techniques of governing”. Transcending the dichotomy between normalcy and crisis, Perkowski et al. (2023, p. 111, emphasis in original) differentiate between “protracted” and “acute” crisis narratives, arguing that Frontex has “evolved through crisis” by invoking crisis as an “ever-present possibility and perpetual threat to Europe”.

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Conceptualizing the modern “risk society”, Beck (2006, p. 332, emphasis added) observes that society is “increasingly occupied with debating, preventing and managing risks that it itself has produced”, which de-politicizes and normalizes risks by incorporating the search for them into the everyday routine of bureaucracies (Rhinard, 2019, p. 624). Similarly, Rhinard (2019, p. 623) argues that EU policymaking has undergone a process of “crisisification”, whereby the traditional democratic decision-making procedures have yielded to quicker, risk-focused processes driven by the perceived need to respond to the latest crisis. He points to the growth of early warning systems from less than 10 in 2000 to more than 70 in 2015, including Frontex’s Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model (CIRAM) (Rhinard, 2019, p. 618). The number of situational awareness centers has also grown, especially in JHA, with DG Home’s strategic analysis and response centre (STAR), the EEAS situation room, and Frontex’s situation center (Rhinard, 2019, p. 619). Similar to the Paris School’s understanding of securitization, Rhinard (2019, pp. 618, 624–625, emphases added) contends that crisisification is a trend “captured less by high-level political agreements… and more by… seemingly mundane administrative procedures” – pointing to the EU’s “search for crises” that it has constructed itself through a pre-emptive security focus and self-imposed logic of urgency.

A main tenet of EU studies is the EU’s ability to thrive on crises, becoming more integrated as member states realize that they have more to gain by pooling their resources. Paul (2017) highlights the role of Frontex’s risk analyses in driving integration in the field of border control and strengthening the EU’s role as a governor of risk, while Sachseder, Stachowitsch, and Binder (2022) focus on how Frontex’s risk analysis reports reproduce gendered and racialized stereotypes to invoke crisis and justify its own expansion. Similarly, Amoore (2013, pp. 5–6, emphasis in original) demonstrates how predictive analysis leads to an undemocratic and exclusionary “politics of possibility” in which risk managers and “expert knowledges” act as “proxy forms of sovereignty”, governing “uncertain, possible futures”. She underlines that the focus on “possibility” rather than “probability” opens for a wider array of actions to be taken to prevent unwanted future scenarios from materializing, despite their “contingency” and “inherent contestability” (Amoore, 2013, p. 26). This dissertation contributes empirically to this scholarship by examining the construction of crisis and risk in Frontex’s border knowledge and its role in securitizing migration and normalizing this securitization by reproducing and inflating the latter and inverting and normalizing the former.
Frontex and Humanitarian Border Control

Frontex
A rapidly growing strand of research on Frontex has emerged in response to its expansion, especially following the 2015 ‘crisis’. Early literature on Frontex provided insights into the processes and inter-institutional debates surrounding its creation (Ekelund, 2014; Léonard, 2009; Neal, 2009). Ekelund (2014) notes the disagreement among the EU institutions on Frontex’s tasks, budget, and the composition of its Management Board, with greater resistance within the Parliament than the Council towards Frontex’s creation. Léonard (2009) notes that the Commission and the Council were reluctant to set up an agency that would limit their powers, whereas Parliament was more concerned with transparency and accountability in Frontex’s institutional set up. Kalkman (2020, p. 4) identifies five dominant themes in research on Frontex: its activities and expansion of tasks; issues relating to legitimacy, accountability, and transparency; securitization and biopolitics; human rights, the principle of non-refoulement, and the humanitarian-security nexus; and Frontex’s position in the EU bureaucracy and the extent of its autonomy.

He points out that despite the increased scholarly focus on Frontex, there are still gaps in the literature, including on: Frontex’s internal functioning and organizational culture; internal debates about border control in the agency; how Frontex officials deal with the agency’s rapid expansion; Frontex’s relations with host countries, EU agencies, and institutions; and to what extent Frontex tries to influence policy decisions (Kalkman, 2020, pp. 11–12). Kalkman (2020, p. 12) highlights that, due to Frontex’s secrecy and the difficulty of accessing it, there is limited interview data with Frontex officials and a lack of understanding of how they reconcile conflicting demands in their daily work, as well as a lack of insights from crisis studies and theory-building. This dissertation contributes to filling this gap by incorporating interviews with Frontex officials and seconded border guards in order to understand how they rationalize their work, examining the productive role of crisis and risk, and advancing the notions of banal securitization and its normalization. It also contributes to the literature on frontline workers and street-level bureaucrats and their coping mechanisms in their daily work (see e.g., Borrelli, 2018; Ekstedt, 2023; Lipsky, 2010).

The body of literature that is the most relevant for this dissertation focuses on Frontex’s risk analyses and their de-politicizing and securitizing effects. Horii (2016) and Paul (2017, 2018) argue that rather than being neutral and scientific, Frontex’s risk analyses constitute a de-politicized form of “knowledge” (Horii,
or “governance tool” (Paul, 2017) that influences EU-level strategic priorities and funding allocation to member states, thereby serving as a legitimizing factor in a securitized environment. Paul (2017, p. 689, emphasis added) contends that Frontex’s risk analyses have fueled the “risk-based governance of European border control” and sanitized and harmonized border control by promising “efficiency” and “effectiveness”. With risk analysis constituting the second largest budget item after joint operations in 2015 (Paul, 2017, p. 691), Horii (2016, p. 246, emphasis added) underlines that “this has positioned risk analysis as equally important as border checks and surveillance”.

Campesi (2022, pp. 138, 189, 183) highlights the role of Frontex’s “intelligence and knowledge production” in promoting a “knowledge-based border control model” that expands surveillance, prioritizes border security over refugees and migrants’ security, and transforms Europe’s borders into an “apparatus of social differentiation”.

Follis (2018, p. 214) similarly observes that border control has undergone a process of “Europeanization” through the production, circulation, and embrace of a specific “European border knowledge” by expert agencies like Frontex, which informs practices on the ground. Moreover, Fjørtoft (2022, pp. 557–558, emphasis added) demonstrates how “the appeal to depoliticized expertise worked to legitimize increased… power to… Frontex” after the 2015 ‘crisis’ due to its promises of “technical neutrality, quantification, and objective indicators”. While this literature draws attention to the role of Frontex’s risk analyses in legitimizing exclusionary border controls, it still under-theorizes this form of knowledge and Frontex’s role as an epistemic actor in the field of European external(ized) border control. The dissertation thus makes a conceptual contribution to this literature by introducing the notion of border knowledge and detailing its particular logics and consequences for the policies and responses to irregularized migration that become conceivable in this field.

**Humanitarian Border Control**

Lastly, a recent body of literature has flourished around the concepts of humanitarian borderwork (Cuttitta, 2014; DeBono, 2019b; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), the humanitarian border (Walters, 2011), and the humanitarian-security nexus (Andersson, 2017b; De Lauri, 2018; Williams, 2016). Spanning critical border studies, critical migration studies, and anthropology, this line of research is critical of the humanitarian framing of deadly bordering practices despite highlighting that logics of both care and control have a long history in humanitarian interventions (Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011). Pallister-
Wilkins (2017), Cuttitta (2014), and Andersson (2014, 2016, 2017b) focus on how humanitarian border control has emerged in Europe since the early 2000s, Frontex’s dual role in the provision of care and control, and the role of the EU’s “border security model” in fueling the smuggling industry, irregularized migration, and deaths at the borders. Others have examined the uneasy relationship between security and humanitarianism in Frontex’s activities and public communication (Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Björling, 2022; Horsti, 2012; Perkowski, 2018).

Legal scholars have stressed issues of human rights, access to asylum at Europe’s sea borders, and accountability for violations in the “multi-actor settings” in which Frontex operates in (Fink, 2018; Gkliati, 2018; Moreno-Lax, 2018; Rijpma, 2017). Focusing on the US-Mexico border, Williams (2016) demonstrates how the US Border Patrol has promoted a discourse of “humanitarian border enforcement” that casts more border controls as the remedy to migrant deaths rather than as part of its cause, resulting in a “safety/security nexus”. Squire (2017, p. 514) conducts a US-EU comparison of “governing migration through death”, underscoring the “biophysical violence” of borders (e.g., harsh conditions in the desert) and the routinized tactics behind the left-to-die boats in the Mediterranean. Similarly, Garelli and Tazzioli (2017) emphasize the productive power of the EU’s “military-humanitarian approach”, framing the naval operation EUNAVFOR MED as able to both catch smugglers and save lives; while Little and Vaughan-Williams (2017) analyze how Australia’s “stop the boats” policy is couched in a humanitarian rhetoric that claims that it saves lives by preventing people from getting on the boats in the first place.

Aradau (2004) and Pallister-Wilkins (2015, 2017, 2018) examine the intertwining of a “politics of pity” with the “politics of risk”, and how these discourses are mobilized by policymakers to portray refugees and migrants as being both “at risk” and “a risk”. Similarly, DeBono (2019b) shows how border workers in reception centers in Italy and Malta draw on a “hospitality” discourse despite the securitized nature of these centers, with the former serving as an “empty signifier”. An attendant sub-body of literature deals with border deaths, practices of counting and accounting for these (Forensic Architecture, 2016; Last, 2015; The Migrant Files, 2016; United for Intercultural Action, 2020), and the role of different actors in this “border death regime” (Cuttitta, Häberlein, & Pallister-Wilkins, 2019). The dissertation contributes to this interdisciplinary strand of literature with the conceptualization of ‘inverted humanitarian border control’ as characterizing the field and Frontex’s border knowledge (see concepts
section), and how this frame helps border guards, Frontex, and DG Home
officials to rationalize the deadly consequences of their work.

Theoretical Framework

Much of what is being done in the name of security is quiet, technical and
unspectacular… and just as much… does not declare itself to be in the name of
security at all. (Neal 2009, p. 352, emphases added)

This section outlines the theoretical framework and concepts deployed. The first
sub-section provides a brief overview of the two main schools of securitization
theory – the Copenhagen and Paris schools – and details how I contribute to this
framework by introducing the concepts of banal securitization (drawing
inspiration from Billig’s, 1995, banal nationalism) and its normalization, which
allows me to focus on both discourses and practices and transcend the
norm/exception binary in the securitization literature. The second sub-section
explains how I conceptualize the notions of field, border knowledge, crisis and
risk, and inverted humanitarian border control.

Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen School

The Copenhagen School is a constructivist theory introduced by Buzan, Wæver
and de Wilde (1998, p. vii) in response to the widened security agenda following
the Cold War in which it is contended that “security is a particular type of
politics” applicable not only to the military sector but to the political and societal
sectors as well. In the political sector, a state’s sovereignty or ideology can be
seen as threatened by “anything that questions recognition, legitimacy, or
governing authority” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 22), such as the state’s territorial
integrity when faced with irregularized migration. In the societal sector, threats
to identity can be construed as a security issue depending on the openness of the
population to religious and cultural “others” (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 22–23; cf.
Billig’s, 1995, “hot nationalism”). Positioning themselves against the
“traditionalists” in security studies, Buzan et al. (1998, p. vii, emphases added)
provide an “operational method for… understanding who can securitize what…
under what conditions” and with which effects. According to the Copenhagen
School, securitization occurs “when an issue is presented as posing an existential
threat to a designated referent object” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21, emphasis added) by a powerful actor, regardless of the objectivity of the threat. Security is thus invoked for specific purposes, elevating an issue to “high politics” and justifying “the use of extraordinary measures” to handle it (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 21).

Drawing on speech act theory, Buzan et al. (1998, p. 21) argue that by simply “speaking” security “a state representative declares an emergency”, which makes securitization “a more extreme version of politicization” (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23–24).13 The Copenhagen School therefore draws attention to the discursive process of securitization, whereby securitizing actors (e.g., policymakers) frame an issue (e.g., migration) as a security threat to a referent object (e.g., the EU) in trying to convince an audience (e.g., the public) that exceptional measures are necessary. Securitizing moves thus need to be accepted by an audience in order to be successful. Similar to Fairclough’s (2015) concepts of “the generation of hegemonic common sense” and “naturalization of discourse” (see methods chapter), Buzan et al. (1998) emphasize that the securitization of an issue does not require constant securitizing moves in order to remain securitized if becomes institutionalized. This happens when a shared understanding or certain type of response to an issue becomes so ingrained (e.g., in the various institutions of the state) that it is no longer questioned.

In those cases, “constant drama does not have to be present, because it is implicitly assumed that when we talk of this… we are by definition in the area of urgency” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 27, emphasis in original). Hence, if “a given type of threat is persistent or recurrent” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 27), the securitized response becomes routine. The Copenhagen School further understands securitization as negative and a political choice, favoring de-securitization since issues are then dealt with in an open and deliberative manner (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 29). Securitization is seen as “a failure to deal with issues as normal politics”,14 with de-securitization being the reverse process of securitization, in which a securitized issue is taken “out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 4).15 Since the

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13 Billig (1995, p. 96) similarly argues that politicians are important in the reproduction of banal nationalism because they are “familiar figures”.

14 Here the Paris School differs by taking the starting point that securitization has already made its way into routine procedures, which then become the object of analysis (Bigo, 2002; Campesi, 2022).

15 This possibility of reversal exists in Billig’s (1995, p. 33, emphases added) framework as well, in which it is noted that “what is made into common practice can, under certain circumstances, be unmade or become a locus of struggle”.

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Copenhagen School locates securitization in discourse, discourse analysis is their preferred method for analyzing how this occurs, focusing on “texts that are central” in the sense that if a security discourse is operative in this community, it should be expected to materialize in this text because this occasion is sufficiently important” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 177, emphasis in original).

The Copenhagen School is thus most useful for analyzing speech acts and when an issue is in the process of being securitized. Since I do not analyze political speeches and take the stance that migration has already become securitized in the field of European external(ized) border control, the theory is not sufficient on its own for my purposes. This is why I have chosen to bring in the Paris School and Billig (1995), since their emphasis on the routine and banal better fits with my focus on the unspectacular ways in which securitization is maintained in this field. However, I utilize some aspects from the Copenhagen School that are relevant for my analysis. These include the possibility of explicit securitizations, which fits with Billig’s (1995) notion of “hot nationalism”; the institutionalization of securitization, which complements my understanding of normalization; and the role of the audience, which is relevant for my analysis of how securitization is resisted and reproduced among key actors in European external(ized) border control. By bringing these tools with me, I will be able to examine how securitization occurs through both spectacular discourses and ordinary practices in this field, as well as whether it is normalized among civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials, and if so, how.

The target audience of Frontex’s risk analysis reports are European policymakers and national border guard authorities (personal communication Frontex, 20/4/23), but I have added civil society actors as a relevant audience in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of securitization’s normalization in this field, which would not be possible without including these actors’ critical perspectives. The Copenhagen School has been criticized for both under-theorizing and under-researching the role of the audience (Aradau, 2004; Balzacq, 2005; Côté, 2016), despite insisting on the intersubjective character of securitization as being an outcome of a negotiation between the securitizing actor and audience.16 Buzan et al. (1998, p. 41, emphasis added) provide no other

16 Neal (2009) also problematizes the translatability of the approach from a national context to a supranational one like the EU and the fact that statements by EU officials are not as widely debated among the public as those by national leaders. Hellström (2006), however, demonstrates how migration became securitized through the construction of the AFSJ, arguing that “a collective perception of the outside world as ultimately dangerous may in turn justify acts of securitization also at a supra-national level” (Hellström, 2006, p. 180, emphasis added). Billig (1995) also discusses how supranational organizations such as the EU can replace national loyalties.
definition of the audience than “those the securitizing act attempts to convince to accept exceptional procedures because of the specific security nature of some issue”. This means that the audience does not necessarily have to have read Frontex’s risk analysis reports nor that the negotiation needs to take place in a public space, as long as Frontex considers these actors relevant to convince. This is clearly the case for border guards and DG Home officials, who are charged with developing and implementing border controls on the ground. While Frontex may not consider civil society as an audience, I believe that they constitute an audience since they operate in an environment that is affected by Frontex’s border knowledge and because they keep up to date on the agency’s activities, with many of them advising Frontex on fundamental rights through the Consultative Forum (CF).

The Paris School

While the Copenhagen School has little to say about what happens to securitization between purported crises, the Paris School allows me to focus on moments of normalcy, where securitization remains beneath the surface. Rather than focusing on exceptional instances of dramatized discourse, the Paris School examines how securitization takes place through routine practices that draw less attention (Bigo, 2013).¹⁷ The approach contends that issues can be securitized not just through discourse but technical and administrative practices such as “population profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation, category creation, and proactive preparation” carried out by expert agencies (Bigo, 2002, pp. 65–66).¹⁸ Bigo (2014, p. 211, emphasis added) argues that these run-of-the-mill practices play an equally important role in securitizing processes as speech acts by powerful actors:

It is necessary to understand how... discourses are usually forged as forms of ex post facto justification of the everyday practices that enact a governmentality of fear and unease, and to analyse the correlation between these rationalizations via practical justifications and the (in)securitization practices of the actors.

¹⁷ Billig (1995, p. 77) also advocates looking for banal nationalism in “stodgy government documents” rather than “epic ballads”.

¹⁸ The approaches thus deviate in the unit of analysis: the speech act for the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998) versus the practices carried out by a securitizing actor or even the actor itself for the Paris School (Bigo, 2013; Léonard, 2009).
By placing so much emphasis on speeches, key moments, and individuals, Bigo (2013, pp. 118–119) believes that the Copenhagen School neglects the role of bureaucrats who frame security in their day-to-day work. This emphasis on the role of bureaucrats in securitizing migration fits with my focus on Frontex and DG Home officials, with Frontex’s risk analyses being a desktop exercise carried out by officials working in the Risk Analysis Unit. DG Home officials can be categorized as both policymakers and bureaucrats due to the EU’s hybrid institutional set up. The Paris School shares the Copenhagen School’s understanding of securitization as constructed, with Bigo (2002, p. 68, emphasis added) emphasizing that “practices of security are not given by nature but are the outcome of political acts by politicians and specialists on threat management”. It also views securitization as negative: “the wording is never innocent” (Bigo, 2002, p. 71). Moreover, critical discourse analysis (CDA) can be used to study the discursive aspects of securitizing practices, with Bigo (2013, p. 125, emphases added) underlining the need to critically engage with the construction of categories:

> The categorization of facts, individuals or groups, as a danger, risk, threat, or simply unwanted, is produced by institutional interests and strategies of justification. By naming what is insecurity, and what is freedom, institutions engaged in security practices draw a veil over what may be challenged as arbitrary choices.

I understand securitizing practices as those that embody a “specific threat image” and convey to observers “that the issue they are tackling is a security threat” (Léonard, 2010, p. 237). This includes practices that have traditionally been implemented to tackle security threats, such as war and terrorism (e.g., the deployment of military equipment) but also risk management. As Léonard (2010, p. 236, emphasis added) points out, “there are cases where a logic of security is at play, even though no securitising discourse is uttered in the public sphere to justify it”.

Rather than privileging one actor, the Paris School understands securitization as a result of struggles among security professionals over their categorization of “threats” (Bigo 2013). This fits with my focus on how different actors in the field of European external(ized) border control negotiate the securitization of

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19 Billig (1995, p. 27, emphasis added) similarly sees the “battle for nationhood as a battle for hegemony”.

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migration. Drawing on the Paris School thus allows me to focus not only on sensational discourses by “the ones who speak a lot” (e.g., policymakers) but also mundane practices by “the ones who do not speak so much” (i.e., bureaucrats) and contribute to securitization in more implicit ways (Bigo, 2013, p. 118). As Neal (2009, p. 351, emphases added) observes, Frontex’s security discourse:

Sits alongside the (perhaps deliberately) less controversial discourse of regulation, best practice, training, co-ordination and management… while the Member States speak of ‘urgency’, for the most part FRONTEX speaks ‘risk’ as a series of quiet, professional, technical practices.20

The fact that some securitizing practices go quieter than others (Balzacq, 2008) therefore does not mean that they do not warrant scrutiny (see Billig’s, 1995, p. 93, emphasis on “small words”). This leads us to my contribution to securitization theory, which is the concept of banal securitization and its normalization. As I will explain in the following, I understand securitization as having different modes: one which is emergency-driven (following the Copenhagen School) and another that operates through a managerial logic that is continuous rather than crisis-driven (in accordance with the Paris School). These are treated as opposite ends of a spectrum rather than being mutually exclusive.

**Banal Securitization and its Normalization**

We should be less concerned with the spectacular dialectic of norm/exception and more concerned with an ongoing process of incremental normalization that is not quite spectacular or controversial enough to draw attention to itself (Neal, 2009, p. 353, emphases added).

Building on the theoretical framework outlined above, I introduce the concepts of ‘banal securitization’ and the ‘normalization of securitization’. Banal securitization draws attention to the everyday ways in which migration is securitized, which contributes to normalizing securitization since it becomes taken for granted (cf. Fairclough, 2015). In conceptualizing banal securitization, I draw on Billig’s (1995) notion of banal nationalism, which he defines as the inconspicuous “reminders” of nationalism that surround citizens of Western states in their daily lives. These include everything from flags hanging outside

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20 See Campesi (2022, p. 30) for a similar discursive divergence between member states and the EU.
public buildings to the sports pages in newspapers celebrating a nation’s wins. Billig (1995, p. 39) develops the term to capture the routine flaggings of nationalism that “slip away” from scholarly attention. He argues for widening the concept to include not only fervent expressions of nationalism such as “rolling tanks” but tacit ones as well, understanding nationalism as “simultaneously obvious and obscure” (Billig, 1995, pp. 4, 14, emphasis added). To clarify, I am not interested in banal nationalism in itself but the study of the banal, of which Billig provides an example of.

Billig’s treatment of nationalism as having both a “hot” and “banal” variant complements my focus on both explicit and implicit forms of securitization. His definition of hot nationalism reflects the Copenhagen School’s understanding of securitization, describing it as being “extraordinary, politically charged and emotionally driven” (Billig, 1995, pp. 43–44). Banal nationalism, on the other hand, has more in common with the Paris School, with Billig (1995, pp. 45–46) arguing that it is during periods of “calm” that nationalism “seems to disappear from sight”, with most flags around the world remaining “unwaved” and “unnoticed” much of the time. I should note that by using the term ‘banal’, I do not suggest that there is anything trivial about the securitization of migration, especially not for refugees and migrants. Rather I want to draw attention to what has come to be seen as ordinary ways in which this is done. Billig (1995, p. 7) also stresses that despite the “reassuring normality” of banal nationalism, it is not “benign”, serving as readily for mobilization during times of crisis as its more extreme version (cf. Arendt’s, 1965/2006, banality of evil).

Billig’s framework, in which he urges for critical analysis of how nationalism is expressed banally through discourse and hence functions as an ideology that comes to influence ‘common sense’ (Billig 1995, pp. 8–9), complements my methodological framework as well (see Fairclough, 2015). Similar to the Paris and Copenhagen Schools’ understanding of securitization, Billig (1995, p. 61) understands nationalism as socially constructed, which means it needs to be analyzed through shared assumptions and “habits of thinking”. This is in line with my critical constructivist approach, with Billig arguing that social scientists need to examine the forms of nationalism that have become so ingrained in our consciousness that they cease to appear as such. To study the banal thus involves questioning core assumptions, deep-seated beliefs, and the seemingly unnoteworthy and “peripheral” (Billig, 1995, p. 51; see Wetherell and Potter, 1992, for a discursive mapping of everyday racism).

I not only focus on how migration is securitized, however, but also on how the measures that accompany it (e.g., increased border controls) come to be seen as
normal through their repeated justifications, routinized implementation, and gradual institutionalization. This is what I refer to as the *normalization* of securitization, which I understand as the process whereby securitization becomes so commonplace that it is almost rendered invisible. This conceptualization draws on the Copenhagen School’s notion of the institutionalization of securitization (Buzan et al., 1998) and Fairclough’s (2015) notions of the generation of hegemonic ‘common sense’ and naturalization of discourse (see the methods chapter). The concept of normalization thus highlights how what seemed like exceptional measures in response to the 2015 ‘crisis’, including the erection of fences and military operations at sea, have since become so common that they draw less attention. I will argue that just as nationalism has become so familiar to people that it needs no explanation (Billig, 1995, pp. 13–15), so has securitization – it appears as ‘natural’. This is similar to Billig’s (1995) emphasis that banal nationalism operates beyond the level of awareness through symbols and constant flaggings that are so familiar that they become overlooked. Without explicating it as such, his conception of banal nationalism rests on a process of normalization, whereby “once nations are established… nationalism becomes banal… its absence becomes unimaginable” (Billig, 1995, p. 77, emphasis added).

Similarly, banal securitization facilitates securitization’s normalization, with the two working in tandem. The significance of nationalism is not “diminished if it is treated as routine” (Billig, 1995, p. 51), which can also be said of banal securitization as it becomes institutionalized rather than sporadic. Banal securitization will thus be used to examine the (un)remarkable ways in which Frontex’s risk analysis reports securitize migration, while normalization aims to capture how this is rationalized in the reports and among actors in the field. While seemingly a contradiction in terms, banal securitization seeks to de-exceptionalize securitization, taking the drama and urgency out of it by emphasizing the more subtle but nonetheless ubiquitous and harmful ways in which migration is securitized in European external(ized) border control (cf. Kristensen, 2020). As such, I understand banal securitization and its normalization as mutually reinforcing, with the former being part and parcel of making securitized discourses and practices seem like reasonable responses to unwanted migration.

The core of my argument is that securitization is most fruitfully conceived as being neither spectacular nor humdrum but with these forms being *mutually constitutive*: explicit securitizations spring from banal ones and are only the tip of the “iceberg” (Bigo, 2002, p. 86) and the most visible. They do not come out
of nowhere, but build on less conspicuous but constant processes of securitization. I thus propose to stretch the concept of securitization, treating its form not as static but rather fluid. Thinking of securitization as a scale opens for analysis of when and how the shifts between its explicit and mundane form take place, hence eclipsing the norm/exception binary in securitization theory. This enables analysis of securitization’s form and degree, with the latter including instances of intensification or abatement (see Figure 4).  

![Figure 4: Characteristics of securitization (author’s elaboration).](image)

This conceptualization is in line with Campesi’s (2022, pp. 29–30, emphases added) emphasis on the “complex interplay between the norm and the exception” in securitization, which leads him to argue that although the EU border regime has evolved incrementally “through a constant process of securitization through technocratic risk management”, this does not preclude moments of exceptional expressions of crisis such as in 2015. Perkowski et al. (2023, pp. 110–111, emphasis added) also underline that “even banal and routine border practices in EUrOpe are underpinned by notions of… protracted crisis”, which sustain “fears of uncontrolled mass migration of unruly ‘others’”. Neal (2009, pp. 347–348, emphases in original), on the other hand, contends that Frontex signifies:

The opposite of securitization or exceptionalism, in that it aims to regulate and harmonize the border practices of individual states, preventing the arbitrariness and erosion of rights that are associated with national sovereignty over borders and migration… in this sense FRONTEX is not the institutionalization of exceptionalism, but the institutionalization of normalization in the form of European Union technologies and regulations.

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21 This could also include its speed. Compare Léonard and Kaunert’s (2020) “spiralling of securitization”.
Conversely, I will argue that Frontex represents the institutionalization of the normalization of securitization due to its rapid growth over the past two decades. Rather than preventing the “arbitrariness” of border controls and “erosion of rights” by member states, I will show how Frontex has standardized these through the dissemination of its border knowledge and operational practices to national border authorities. Neal’s (2009, pp. 350–351, emphasis added) understanding of Frontex’s risk analysis activities as “an advanced form of these normalizing practices” thus does not rule out their securitizing effects. Lastly, the Paris School’s focus on the role of bureaucrats and Billig’s (1995, p. 43) emphasis on the banal provide useful lenses for analyzing how civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials become complicit in securitization either through their ignoring or “habitual overlooking” of how their routine practices contribute to securitize migration in this field (cf. Arendt’s, 1965/2006, conceptualization of evil acts as due to lack of critical reflection). As Bigo (2002, p. 66, emphases added) points out:

The ineffectiveness of critical discourses is not a consequence of a simple blindness on part of politicians… [and] security professionals… [T]he refusal to take into account the critical discourses can be characterized not as a lack of knowledge but as a policy of forgetting, as denial.

Just as there is nothing inevitable about nation states (Billig, 1995), neither is there anything inevitable about banal securitization and its normalization, despite its pervasiveness in European external(ized) border control. Instead, I will demonstrate how securitization is continuously perpetuated by civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials through the seemingly innocuous discourses and practices that they draw on. Banal securitization and normalization will hence be used to examine securitization’s (un)spectacular but unabated spread in this field through “unmemorable” words and “dull” practices (Billig, 1995, p. 93).

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22 See Krzyzanowski et al. (2023) for the role of crises in normalizing anti-democratic processes.

23 Cf. Hellström’s (2015, p. 31, emphasis in original) “common European grammar of nationalism, that is based… on a politics of fear”.
Concepts

This section explains the key concepts used, including the field of EUropean external(ized) border control, border knowledge, crisis and risk, and inverted humanitarian border control.

The Field of EUropean External(ized) Border Control

This dissertation draws on Fairclough’s (2015) concept of “order of discourse” to conceptualize EUropean external(ized) border control as a discursive field in which the discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism interact with each other (see also Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Drawing on Foucault and Bourdieu, Fairclough understands the order of discourse as the “configuration of discourses... within the same social field or institution”, which may conflict with each other if they do not share the same ‘common sense’ assumptions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 141–142). The concept of ‘field’ helps to analytically delimit the order of discourse in EUropean external(ized) border control and opens the relationship between the different discourses up for analysis. Dominance is key to this ordering, with Fairclough (2003, p. 206, emphases added) pointing out that “some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or ‘alternative’”. The order of discourse in a specific field is not fixed, however, but constantly being negotiated. This allows for an analysis of “contingency and permanence” over time, in which:

Areas where all discourses share the same common-sense assumptions are less open to change and more likely to remain stable, whereas areas where different discourses struggle to fix meaning in competing ways are unstable and more open to change. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 142, emphases added)

The order of discourse lends itself to the analysis of discursive practices (see methods chapter), as any order (or field) contains specific discursive practices through which texts are produced and consumed, either reproducing or restructuring the existing order of discourse (Fairclough, 2015). Conceptualizing EUropean external(ized) border control as a field thus widens the scope of analysis to include how different actors reproduce or resist the securitization of migration, which contributes to the Copenhagen School’s emphasis on the role of the audience in accepting or rejecting securitizing moves. The notion of field also facilitates examination of discursive struggles both “inside... and between
institutions for what is to count as the *legitimate truth*” (Bigo, 2002, p. 74, emphasis added). This is in line with the Paris School’s focus on actors and the study of the “field of security professionals” (Bigo et al., 2016) and securitizing practices in the different “social universes” of EU border control (Bigo, 2014). Bigo et al. (2016, p. 59, emphasis added) use Bourdieu’s notion of field to delineate the “space of competition between agencies and institutions over the pertinent knowledge concerning threats, risks and vulnerabilities”, as well as his notion of “doxa” (taken for granted truths), with each field having its own doxa that becomes accepted by actors over time, who in turn come to rationalize the status quo (Bigo et al., 2016, p. 53). The value in focusing on the larger field of EUropean external(ized) border control thus lies in the broader focus it brings in examining the interactions between the different discourses and practices in this field as well as on the actors involved, which brings a deeper understanding of the securitization of migration.

The notion of field opens for not just a mapping of the field but a *genealogy* of it as well (see Bigo, 2013), with this dissertation being inspired by Foucault’s method of genealogy, which allows me to trace the evolution of the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. Genealogies construct “intelligible trajectories of events, discourses, and practices” (Dean, 1992, in Walters, 2002, p. 562), enabling an understanding of how the current situation came about. As such, they function as “the *methodical problematization* of the given, of the taken-for-granted” (Dean, 1992, in Walters, 2002, p. 562, emphasis added). Similar to Fairclough’s (2015) notions of the generation of hegemonic common sense and the naturalization of discourse, genealogies draw attention to how perceptions of phenomena are historically and contextually contingent, being products of the dominant discourses and practices at the time. Together, the concepts of field and genealogy will be used to analyze the development of the discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism in EUropean external(ized) border control over the last decade, as well as to challenge the *normalization* of securitization since “the primary value of genealogy lies with its ability to unsettle the present*” (Walters, 2002, p. 562, emphasis added).

This follows Bigo’s use of these concepts to “map the *trajectories* of EU security agencies, as well as of their structural positions” (Bigo et al., 2016, p. 49, emphasis added), along with his admonition to “analyze the *internal logic* of the field… that structures the speakable and unspeakable concerning immigration and the practices of security agencies” (Bigo, 2002, p. 85, emphasis added). This is important since “security is what the professionals of unease *make of it*” (Bigo, 2002, p. 85, emphasis added).
Frontex’s Border Knowledge

The core function of the twenty-first century border management, that is distinguishing between persons deemed eligible to enter a given territory and those to be rejected, depends on the continuous production and supply of specialized knowledge. (Follis, 2018, p. 214, emphasis added)

Migration research has highlighted that rather than being a “natural ‘resource’ to be harvested”, knowledge production is a “social and political process” that is “key for lending legitimacy to specific policies and practices, and to certain actors or the EU as a whole” (Welfens & Bonjour, 2022, pp. 952–953, emphasis added; Boswell, 2008). As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 200, emphasis added) point out, “knowledge does not just exist but is rather produced by choices made by specific people in specific situations”, making it a contingent representation of reality that could be different. This brings about questions such as “what (and whose) knowledge is accepted as legitimate… who has the monopoly over knowledge on what, who is silenced and what knowledge is not recognized as knowledge” (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 199, emphasis in original). Rather than being objective, this dissertation thus understands knowledge as “always partial and… produced by following a particular view of the world” (Haraway, 1988, in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 202, emphases added). This means that risk managers like Frontex “not only respond to threats but also determine what is and what is not a threat or a risk” and they do so as “professionals”, which affords them authority (Bigo, 2002, p. 74, emphases added).

I understand Frontex’s border knowledge as the knowledge produced by Frontex’s risk analysis reports about the migratory situation at the European external(ized) border. The purpose of this knowledge is to predict, monitor, and categorize mobility, enable (pre-emptive) responses to irregularized migration at specific sections of the border, and facilitate the on-the-ground control of who can cross the borders in ‘legitimate’ ways and who cannot. Although I focus on the particular kind of knowledge generated by Frontex’s risk analyses, this could also include Frontex’s public communication, training material, fundamental rights products, or R&D on technology. Frontex’s border knowledge is conceptualized as constituting a particular episteme with its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. The ontology of this episteme is that migration must be carefully managed to ensure the security of the European external(ized) border and free internal mobility. The epistemology guiding it is that the best way to do so is through systematic data collection on selected indicators of ‘irregular
migration’, including detections of ‘illegal’ border crossings, clandestine entry, ‘illegal’ stay, facilitators, fraudulent documents, refusals of entry, asylum applications, and returns, along with predictive indicators on economic and (geo)political developments in key third countries.

Security and risk are central concepts in Frontex’s border knowledge, although both are partly constructed by the reports themselves. This knowledge thus warrants scrutiny because of its securitized ontological and epistemological underpinnings, which inform responses to irregularized migration in this field. This is all the more important since Frontex portrays its risk analyses as the inverse: as above politics and a comprehensive account of what takes place at the external borders and beyond (see also Horii, 2016; Paul, 2017), despite omitting any references to fundamental rights or deaths at the border. It is hence necessary to problematize Frontex’s selective portrayal of the situation at the external(ized) border since Frontex’s “appeal to expertise may have a legitimizing function” (Fjørtoft, 2022, pp. 567–568, emphasis added), obscuring the political and normative considerations that undergird its risk analyses. The examination of Frontex’s key products, the annual risk analysis reports, is thus but one attempt at exposing their banal securitization of migration and normalization of securitization. As Welfens and Bonjour (2022, p. 953) emphasize, “how data is collected, arranged, presented and visualized… forms an essential part of seeking legitimacy for certain actors and policy positions”.

Hence, rather than just being an “information hub” (Paul, 2018, p. 231), I consider Frontex as a powerful epistemic actor in this field, with its risk analyses being “not a simple aggregation of data for operational border checks and surveillance activities, but… a particular form of knowledge with an important political effect” (Horii, 2016, p. 242, emphasis added). As Paul (2018, p. 231, emphases added) points out:

While ‘migration risks’ remain notoriously contentious and hard to assess, what matters is that their discursive construction as assessable and manageable adverse events, which readily lend themselves to risk analysis techniques, contributes to the securitization of migration.

Conceptualizing Frontex’s risk analysis reports as comprising an influential type of knowledge thus helps theorize this securitized knowledge production and its characteristics and effects. As Campesi (2022, p. 147, emphases added) puts it:

By exercising its clear hegemony over the ‘power of risk definition’… in the
context of EU border management, Frontex places itself in a quasi-hierarchical position with respect to national border services… [that are] increasingly subject to the Agency’s overseeing power… and reduced to the role of mere ‘consumers’ of Frontex’s analytical products… [B]y presenting itself as the only agency with an overall awareness of the situation at the EU borders, Frontex has ended up exercising a creeping and pervasive regulatory capacity. In the governance of EU borders, risk analysis and knowledge production has thus become a key governance tool.

The focus on knowledge production is in line with my methodological framework, with critical discourse analysis emphasizing texts’ production and consumption in “specific ways in specific social contexts” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78). It also fits with my theoretical framework, which includes the Copenhagen School’s focus on the discursive construction of ‘security threats’, Billig’s (1995) emphasis on banal processes, and Bigo’s (2002, pp. 82–83, emphasis added) assertion that securitization has concentrated power in “the hands of the very individuals who have an administrative-management knowledge of threats and risks”.

Crisis and Risk

Refugee situations are ‘crises’ only when we let them become so, by thinking short term, by failing to plan or work together. (Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in UNHCR, 2019a, emphasis added)

This dissertation employs a constructivist understanding of crisis and risk, emphasizing the process of crisis construction (Perkowski et al., 2023; Rhinard, 2019) or “performativity” (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014; Mainwaring, 2019). Similar to securitization theory, this involves a focus on how crises are invoked by actors both discursively and through practices (see Krzyzanowski et al., 2023). The ontology of crises as manufactured draws attention not only to how they are conjured but also to the actors involved in this process. I thus follow Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins’ (2016) conceptualization of crisis as both an analytical category and a practice, examining its role in shaping responses to irregularized migration.24 Rather than being a descriptive term, I understand crisis

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24 They use the concept of “crisis labeling” to explain EU and Frontex officials’ framing of the 2011 Arab Spring as a “migration crisis” for Europe despite there being more regional migration within North Africa than to Europe’s shores at the time and the fact that the largest groups of migrants
as a powerful tool that can be used for political purposes to legitimize certain actions, such as to close the borders in response to mass flight (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins 2014, p. 116; see also Paul, 2017, for the similar potential of risk). This critical approach to crisis brings with it a particular epistemology and methodology as well, probing analysis of not the crisis itself but rather its production and effects.

Drawing attention to the role of language in constructing crises, this conceptualization of crisis prompts questions such as to whom is something portrayed as a crisis, by whom, and for what purposes? I employ this framework to analyze how crises are discursively constructed, reproduced, inflated, obscured, and inverted in Frontex’s border knowledge. The notion of inversion is important for understanding how Frontex turns a humanitarian disaster into a security threat by framing the 2015 arrivals as a ‘migration crisis’ rather than a refugee crisis and emphasizing the risks posed by refugees and migrants rather than the risks they face at the external(ized) border. Inversion will also be used to examine how this border knowledge normalizes crisis at Europe’s border despite the number of refugees and migrants declining after 2015. As Perkowski et al. (2020, p. 120, emphases added) note:

> Crisis narratives in relation to migration have become such regular phenomena in Europe over the past two decades that a state of crisis seems increasingly indistinguishable from a state of ‘non crisis’.

Their typology of different types of crises doing different political work is similar to my understanding of the effects of Frontex’s normalization of crisis in this field:

> While narratives invoking moments of acute crisis produce urgency… as well as emergency interventions, those characterizing protracted crisis insist on constant vigilance, surveillance, and preparedness. (Perkowski et al., 2020, pp. 113–114, emphases added)

Similarly, I understand ‘risk’ and ‘threat’ to be productive. As Bigo (2013, p. 125, emphasis added) argues, “politics is centrally about the struggles concerning the boundaries of categories used not only to interpret the world, but also to frame it”. ‘Risk’ and ‘threat’ are understood as being on a scale in which ‘crisis’ is the

were not from North Africa. Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2014, p. 115, emphases added) argue that this framing imposed “spatiotemporal limits on migrant experiences fixing them in time and space while veiling wider forms of structural inequality that drive much mobility today”.

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more extreme form of ‘security threat’, with the ‘risk’ perceived to have become actualized rather than constituting a potentiality. ‘Threat’ is thus treated as a form of ‘risk’, since risk management is inherently anticipatory and:

Supposed to be able to target undesirables or potential overstayers before their dangerousness becomes manifest… by acting on the presumption that such eventuality may occur. (Campesi, 2022, p. 31, emphases added)

As Bigo et al. (2016, p. 55, emphases added) note, “the logic of intelligence is mainly one of anticipation and of a proactive monitoring of the future”, with the aim to “identify and localize a threat before it is actualized and materialized”. There is disagreement in the securitization literature whether ‘risk’ is analogous to ‘security threat’ and whether Frontex should be seen as a risk manager or a securitizing agent through its production of risk analyses (see Léonard, 2010; Neal, 2009). I do not, however, make a strict distinction between ‘risk’ and ‘threat’ since they are largely conflated in Frontex’s border knowledge and by the actors themselves. As Amoore (2013, p. 7, emphasis added) points out:

What matters is not so much a question of whether or how the world is more dangerous… uncertain, or less safe but how specific representations of risk, uncertainty, danger, and security are… writing the contours of that world.

The analysis hence focuses on the construction of crisis and risk in Frontex’s border knowledge and their role in securitizing migration. As Bigo (2002, pp. 68–69, emphases added) emphasizes, “the construction of situations as problems is useful for politicians” who can then “manage them in order to justify their own authority”. As the analysis will show, this is also the case for expert agencies like Frontex.

**Inverted Humanitarian Border Control**

A key issue is the convergence between practices of humanitarian rescue and processes of sovereign capture more traditionally associated with border policing… with the consequent convergence of state agents and humanitarian workers. (De Lauri, 2018, pp. 10–11, emphasis added)

Drawing literary influence from the inverted looking-glass world (Carroll, 1872/1998), I introduce the concept of ‘inverted humanitarian border control’ to explain Frontex’s portrayal of border control being in the best interest of refugees
and migrants. Whereas humanitarianism traditionally has involved a plea for humanity, pacifism, human rights, and universality, border control is by nature exclusionary and oppressive, underpinned by the principles of state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Pallister-Wilkins, 2017). Nevertheless, these disparate concepts have converged over the last decade, as evidenced by the humanitarian framing of border control in Europe (Cusumano, 2019; Cutilta, 2014; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), the US (Williams, 2016), and Australia (Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017). Whereas this literature treats care and control as two sides of the same coin in humanitarian interventions throughout history (Agier, 2011; Fassin, 2012; Ticktin, 2011), I understand the notion of border control being humanitarian as inverting the classic definition and ideal theory of humanitarianism as based on the principles of do no harm, equality, neutrality, and impartiality, since it is being carried out by state actors whose main task is to filter ‘deserving’ subjects from ‘undeserving’ and ‘risky’ ones (see also Nascimento, 2015; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Williams, 2016). This is not to suggest that there has been a point in time when humanitarianism reached its full potential, but to draw attention to the increased politicization and militarization of humanitarianism and its strategic use by political actors (Billaud & De Lauri, 2016; De Lauri, 2018).

The conceptualization of inverted humanitarian border control enables for an analysis of how logics in Frontex’s border knowledge, as well as in this field more generally, are turned upside down, with dichotomies such as migrant safety and border security becoming mutually attainable goals (Williams, 2016) and distinctions between interception/rescue (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015), reception/detention, and smuggling/assistance (Walters, 2011) becoming blurred. The notion of inversion will be used to demonstrate how Frontex and the EU have co-opted a humanitarian discourse to lend legitimacy to securitized practices as they argue that border control now saves lives rather than kills (Waerp, 2019). The analysis will show that through this humanitarian framing of its operations, Frontex “casts itself as a moral actor and protector of human life, securing itself against criticism” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, p. 65, emphasis added), while at the same time obscuring the role of restrictive border controls in producing irregularized migration and deaths at the external(ized) border in the first place (Andersson, 2016).

Frontex’s border knowledge is key in this process, portraying more, rather than less, border controls as the solution to these deaths. In turn, this inverted humanitarian border control leads to paradoxical situations in which refugees and migrants are “happy” to be apprehended by border guards since it saves them
from violent border spaces (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Williams, 2016). As a concept, inverted humanitarian border control problematizes Frontex’s claim to both care for and control of refugees and migrants, with SAR operations saving lives “only so that they might be more effectively apprehended, detained, and deported” (Williams, 2015, para. 26). The notion of inversion further allows for an analysis of how deviance and blame for suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border are shifted from Europe’s border regime to smugglers and the refugees and migrants themselves (cf. Wodak’s, 2020, “victim-perpetrator reversal”), as well as how non-rescue is portrayed as humanitarian. Inverted humanitarian border control is hence understood as a selective and limited form of humanitarianism that reinforces gendered, racialized, and aged hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability (Sachseder et al., 2022), with the principles of classic humanitarianism being:

Undermined, ignored, and *transformed* as humanitarian motivations are deployed by militaries, police forces, and government agencies in various situations for the governance of “problematic peoples” such as insurgent populations, colonized subjects and … *migrants*. (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, p. 59, emphases added)

Lastly, the notion of inversion facilitates analysis of the legitimizing effects of casting border control as humanitarian, which works to expand Frontex’s role in this field and *normalize* securitization by framing SAR as a pull-factor and push and pullbacks as saving lives.
3) METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

An attitude of moral indifference has no connection with scientific ‘objectivity’.
(Weber, 1949, p. 60, emphasis added)

This chapter outlines the dissertation’s methodological framework. The first section details the critical constructivist approach employed, focusing on the role of social constructions and critique, while the second section presents the methods and material used. The last section discusses ethical concerns with constructivist interviews and reflexivity and positionality in critical approaches. Since critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an ontological and epistemological framework and a method (Fairclough, 2015; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), it will be dealt with under both the first and second sections.

A Critical Constructivist Approach

Irregular migration only exists because policies determine which types and levels of migration are permitted and which are not. Thus, irregular migration is a social, political and legal construct. (Düvell, 2014, p. 20, emphases added)

This section outlines the dissertation’s critical constructivist approach, focusing on the important role of social constructions and critique. I have chosen to use this framework in order be able to “show the arbitrariness of some choices presented as the only possible solution… often sacrificing people in the name of securing” (Bigo, 2013, p. 127, emphases added).
Social Constructions

The construction of Europe goes hand in hand with the perception of threats at its borders. (Hellström, 2006, p. 160, emphasis added).

The dissertation understands the social world as partly socially constructed and our knowledge of social phenomena to not be independent of them (see Hacking, 1999; Haslanger, 2012). It adopts critical discourse analysis’ (CDA) ontology that reality is in part constituted through discourse and its epistemology that social phenomena can be studied discursively (Fairclough, 2015). This framework thus entails a focus on how the securitization of migration takes place through both discourses and practices. Social constructions are important in this process, with refugees and migrants’ categorization as ‘irregular’ being a “facilitating condition” (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 32–33) of their subsequent securitization. As Bigo (2002, p. 70, emphasis added) points out, states “delineate the figure of the migrant by inverting the image of the good citizen”. Categories are thus divisive, separating ‘us’ from ‘them’. Rather than taking categories for granted, the dissertation hence attends to their construction. This is important because as Billig (1995, p. 29, emphasis added) points out:

As the ideology of nationalism has spread across the globe, so it has shaped contemporary common sense. Notions, which seem to us so solidly banal, turn out to be ideological constructions of nationalism.

Not only categories are socially constructed, however, but different kinds of people as well, with our perceptions of them working in tandem with their construction (see Hacking, 1986). Examples of this include the ‘refugee’ before the 1951 Refugee Convention, which codified the legal conditions for becoming such (see Orchard, 2018); along with the ‘irregular migrant’ before the closing down of safe and legal routes to Europe in the 1990s, with there being no need for such a category before. Categorizations are therefore not just contingent but bound up with power:

Classificatory schemes, at least in social contexts… do more than just map preexisting groups of individuals; rather our attributions have the power to both establish and reinforce groupings that may eventually come to ‘fit’ the classifications. (Haslanger, 2012, p. 123, emphases added)
This top-down labeling from “a community of experts” (Hacking, 1986, pp. 168, 166) impacts actions towards people as well, with the category ‘irregular migrant’ demanding a different response than the ‘bona fide traveler’. Despite being presented as natural in Frontex’s risk analysis reports, this binary is a politico-legal construction of the Schengen Borders Code, among others (see historical overview chapter). As Düvell (2011, p. 276, emphases added) points out:

It is… undeniable that states, in the course of exercising sovereignty over their territory… determine what is regular and what is not… politics and laws set the conditions under which people can cross borders and stay and work in a country other than that of their nationality.

Similarly, Torpey (2018, p. 11) points out that since states have acquired the monopoly of controlling who crosses its borders, this influences how we come to see certain forms of movement as “illegal” if it deviates from set parameters. Scheel and Squire (2014) trace the category ‘irregular migrant’ to the 2000s, when asylum became the only safe and legal means of migrating to Europe after the end of guest worker programs and subsequent family reunification. The shift from the perception of migration as either forced/voluntary to legal/illicit was spurred by the increased politicization and securitization of migration after 9/11 (Scheel & Squire, 2014).

Social constructions also influence deservingness perceptions, with European states’ understanding of the term ‘refugee’ being largely determined by the narrow provisions of the Refugee Convention (e.g., if there was a clause adding ‘seeking a better life’ there would not be any ‘economic migrants’ anymore). The term ‘regular migration’ by definition constructs its opposite ‘irregular’ migration, which by contrast is criminalized. The arbitrariness of the latter is illustrated by member states’ divergent definitions of it, however, which are:

Based on a mix of references to the illegal crossing of borders, irregular entry or stay, lack of residence permits, lack of work permits, obligations to leave the territory or violations of expulsion orders. (Düvell, 2011, p. 286, emphasis added)

The dissertation’s critical constructivist approach thus directs attention towards how reality comes into being by way of descriptions (Potter, 1996, pp. 97–98). As Hacking (1999, p. 33, emphases added) points out:
Classifications are not determined by how the world is, but are convenient ways in which to represent it… the world does not come quietly wrapped up in facts. Facts are consequences of ways in which we represent the world.

The emphasis on social constructions helps the dissertation de-naturalize the securitization of migration, showing how it is only one out of many possible framings of irregularized migration. As Bigo (2002, p. 71) argues, the words security and migration are not “natural; neither describes ‘phenomena’”. Instead, the relation between them is “fully and immediately political”, both are “contested concepts… used to mobilize political responses, not to explain anything” (Bigo, 2002, p. 71).25 This critical constructivist framework aligns with both Billig (1995) and CDA’s aim to question taken for granted assumptions (Fairclough, 2015), which I do by following these steps:

(0) “In the present state of affairs… X appears to be inevitable”.

(1) “X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things”. (Hacking, 1999, pp. 12, 6)

While constructivist approaches would stop here, critical constructivist ones go further, arguing that:

(2) “X is quite bad as it is.

(3) We would be much better off if X were done away with, or at least radically transformed” (Hacking, 1999, p. 6).

X is here a placeholder for any phenomenon one wishes to debunk as natural, such as migration being a ‘security threat’. Critical constructivist approaches are thus emancipatory, striving to change the status quo for the betterment of disadvantaged groups in society (such as refugees and migrants). The dissertation does so by pointing out the short-sighted, counterproductive, and deadly effects of securitization and advocating for a normalization of migration.

25 See also Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978) for the social construction of “mugging” and the resulting “moral panics” over it.
The Role of Critique

Critique is… *intrinsic* to social science… there is no point in social science if it does not at least offer the *possibility* of some kind of social improvement, even if it doesn’t go beyond enlightenment and reduction of illusion, to material change. (Sayer, 2000, p. 159, emphases added)

Critique is what makes critical constructivist approaches *critical*. Drawing on Fairclough’s (2015) conception of critique, this sub-section discusses how I understand critique as both an analytical tool and an objective in itself due to its potential to challenge dominating discourses and contribute to change.

*Critique of ‘Common Sense’*

A critical constructivist approach entails a critique of current affairs. For the dissertation, this includes critique of the dominating discourses and practices in Frontex’s border knowledge and the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. Critique plays a central role in CDA, which seeks to illuminate the “ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them” (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 2011, p. 395). CDA is thus transformative, with critique being “the mechanism for both explaining social phenomena and for changing them” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 395, emphases added). Being “critical” means asking *why* the discourse is the way it is, which helps us better understand the context in which it is situated as well (Fairclough, 2015, p. 7). As Sayer (2000, p. 159, emphases added) points out, “criticism becomes critique when we not only show that certain beliefs are false but explain *why* they are held, and what produces them”. This important because “ideology *speaks with the voice of nature*”, making “any social world appear, to those who inhabit it, as the natural world” (Billig, 1995, p. 37, emphasis added).

I use this conception of critique to *destabilize* the hegemonic status of securitization in Frontex’s border knowledge and the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. Critique of the prevailing ‘common sense’ in this field is therefore necessary to bring to light the taken for granted assumptions that enable securitization’s normalization, such as crises being everywhere and border control humanitarian. Changing ‘common sense’ is necessary for social change to occur, since this is easier if “the changes advocated for… and the diagnosis of wrongs of existing reality which they are based upon, resonate with *common sense*” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 13, emphasis added). I define ‘common sense’ as:
A form of “everyday thinking” which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world… a popular, easily-available knowledge [which] works intuitively, without forethought or reflection. (Hall & O’Shea, 2013, in Fairclough, 2015, p. 13, emphases added)

Following Gramsci (1971), I understand ‘common sense’ as contextual, being illustrative of the power of “dominant social groups and forces over society as a whole” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 32). This means that there is nothing self-evident about ‘common sense’, which makes it important to scrutinize since it rationalizes certain discourses and practices (see Billig, 1995, for banal nationalism as ‘common sense’, being reproduced through mindless reminders). I do not expect that critiquing Frontex’s border knowledge will lead to a de-securitization of migration in this field, however, but hope that by providing a better understanding of how securitization is maintained and legitimized I can offer a basis for critiquing it and imaging different framings of irregularized migration. Fairclough (2015, pp. 47–48) acknowledges that there is a disjuncture between critique and action in CDA, with critique not being a “sufficient condition” in itself for change but a necessary step in identifying problems and providing solutions, which is my more modest goal.

Critique in Discursive and Social Change

But how can we analyze, let alone critique, such an invisible yet pervasive phenomenon like ‘common sense’? The first step is to identify the dominating discourses and practices undergirding it, and whether they are ideological. Fairclough defines ideological discourses as “particular ways of representing and constructing society which reproduce unequal relations of power… domination and exploitation” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 407, emphasis added). To determine whether discourses are ideological it is thus necessary to consider not just the text itself but its social effects (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 408). This makes ideological critique key to CDA’s emancipatory aims, viewing “discourse as a stake in social struggle as well as a site of social struggle”, being preoccupied with the power in discourse as well as behind it (Fairclough, 2015, p. 3, emphases added). As Haslanger (2012, p. 18, emphases added) points out, “ideology critique disrupts

26 The Wonderland analogy illustrates the fluidity of ‘common sense’, with Alice’s encounters with the creatures leaving her puzzled since their logics deviate from what is considered normal in her world. Similarly, deadly border controls would be considered nonsensical in a context where migration was not securitized.
conceptual dogmatism and... raises questions about... [concepts'] aptness, what they capture, and importantly, what they leave out, distort, or obscure”.

Similarly, I understand Frontex’s security discourse as ideological and securitization as an ideology in the field of European external(ized) border control, which fosters a securitized response to irregularized migration while concealing others. That discourses are ideological does not mean that they cannot be questioned, however. Fairclough (2015, p. 33) argues that changing ‘common sense’ is crucial in the struggle to displace the existing hegemony and impose another (e.g., where migration is de-securitized). Therefore, it is not sufficient to only critique discourse, a wider objective should be to change the social world as well (e.g., by normalizing migration) by critiquing the context in which it is embedded. Due to the reciprocal relationship between discourse and the social world in CDA, discourse becomes “part of social change” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 37). Because of scope, I focus on analyzing changes in the discourses and practices in this field rather than changes in the field itself, however.

**Methods**

This section outlines the methods used to analyze the empirical material. The first part presents the tools used to analyze Frontex’s risk analysis reports, followed by an explanation of how constructivist interview approaches and participant observation are employed.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

I use critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the main method of analyzing the empirical material. Discourse analysis is an umbrella term for approaches that share an interest in the “semiotic dimensions of power, injustice... and political-economic or cultural change in society” (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 394), which aim to “make explicit what normally gets taken for granted” (Cameron, 2001, p. 7, emphasis added). CDA has roots in critical linguistics, with its theoretical origins in critical theory. The approaches can be placed on a spectrum according to their understanding of the constitutive role of discourse, with those that hold discourses to be fully constitutive of the social world at one end and approaches

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27 This is a difference between CDA and the discourse historical approach (DHA), which critiques the discourse rather than the social context it exists in (Fairclough, 2015, pp. 20–21).

28 Discourse features in social change in three ways: 1) social change is in part change in discourse; 2) social change often starts with or is driven by discourse; and 3) social change is represented in discourse (Fairclough, 2015, p. 37).
that see discourse as merely reflecting the social world on the other (see Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, for an overview). Fairclough’s dialectical approach is in the middle, arguing that discourses and the social world are mutually constitutive:

Social structures not only determine discourse, they are also a product of discourse.
Discourse and practice are both the products of structures and the producers of structures. (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 17, emphasis added)

This aligns with my theoretical framework, focusing on how migration is securitized through both discourses (Copenhagen School) and practices (Paris School). Understanding the social world as coming into being as people talk and write it into existence, the concern of critical discourse analysts is with talk, text, and “processes of fact construction” (Potter, 1996). The latter is relevant for my analysis of the picture Frontex paints of the situation at the external(ized) border, supported by CDA’s aim to expose ‘common knowledge’ – which “obscures the fact that ‘the way things are’ is not inevitable… [but] results from particular actions and serves particular interests” (Cameron, 2001, p. 123, emphasis added). As Potter (1996, p. 98, emphasis added) points out, since “descriptions are human practices” they “could have been otherwise”.

There is no agreed upon definition of discourse (see Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, for a discussion). According to speech act theory, “the issuing of an utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin, 1962, in Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 337, emphasis added; cf. Buzan et al.’s, 1998, definition of securitizing speech act). This declarative function of language is also evident in Foucault’s (1972) definition of discourses as “practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak” (in Cameron, 2001, p. 15, emphasis added). I use CDA’s understanding of discourse as a form of practice: through discourse we do not only express things, we also conceptualize them (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 395). Discourse is thus meaning-making that forms part of social reality, including text, talk, images, and body language (Fairclough, 2015, pp. 7–8). CDA will be used to examine how Frontex securitizes migration in its border knowledge and how the different actors in this field manoeuvre this dominating discourse. This will help shed light on how power and knowledge intertwine in Frontex’s account of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism in its reports. The focus on this bureaucratic discourse is important because:
In the modern age... a great deal of power and social control is exercised not by brute physical force... but by the activities of ‘experts’ who are licensed to define, describe and classify things and people. (Cameron, 2001, p. 16, emphasis added)

This is in line with the Paris School’s emphasis on securitization through mundane practices, such as the production of risk analyses by specialized agencies (Bigo, 2002). Both Billig (1995) and the Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998) locate banal nationalism and securitization in discourse, with Billig arguing that the banal must be studied through everyday language use. His understanding of nationalism as both a theoretical construct and practical (enacted, for example, during international sports competitions) aligns with Fairclough’s (2015) dialectical approach. Similarly, Bigo (2002, p. 84) argues that the “political and bureaucratic interplay must be analyzed on a dialectical basis in order to understand better the ‘political spectacle’ that is taking place through the securitization of immigration”.

I understand discourses as linguistic in character (see Fairclough, 1992) and practices as the everyday routine tasks that are carried out by actors in the field of European external(ized) border control (Bigo, 2002; cf. Pallister-Wilkins, 2017, “borderwork”). Since practices such as Frontex’s production of risk analyses have a discursive aspect to them, however, I treat the difference between discourses and practices as fluid (see also Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998; Fairclough, 2015). I use the term ‘discourse’ to refer to the overarching discourses that Frontex draws on its border knowledge and the interviewees in their own accounts, most notably those of security, crisis, and humanitarianism. These will be analyzed with the help of Fairclough’s (2015) tools interdiscursivity, intertextuality, and naturalization of discourse (see below).

The term ‘practice’ is used to refer to the administrative, bureaucratic, and technical tasks carried out by Frontex; policy-oriented ones like DG Home’s production of legislative proposals; operational responses by border guards; and civil society actors’ activities on the ground. These will be studied through the interviewees’ accounts of their work, as well as the field work. The hybrid form ‘discursive practice’ (Fairclough, 2015) will be used to examine the concrete ways in which Frontex uses language in its risk analysis reports to securitize migration. The following will elaborate on how I use these tools to study Frontex’s annual risk analysis reports from 2010–21 and the interviews, including identifying securitizing themes in them.
Discursive Practice and Themes

Fairclough provides a comprehensive framework to analyze texts in their context, which has inspired how I have chosen to conduct this study. I chose to use CDA over other discourse analytical approaches because of its focus on questioning the taken for granted, critique of unequal power relations, and emancipatory promise, which align with my research questions and aims. Fairclough’s framework consists of three dimensions, which include an analysis of the text itself (including themes), how the text is generated and received by an audience (discursive practice) and the context (social practice) in which the text is situated (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 70–73). Fairclough (1992) acknowledges that the different dimensions overlap and that the boundaries between them is not rigid, so I do not make a strict distinction between them in my analysis, rather focusing on their interplay.

Considering that I want to investigate how securitization is discursively constructed, my analysis focuses on the two first dimensions of Fairclough’s analytical framework: the text and discursive practice. This includes Frontex’s risk analysis reports and the interviews. While the third dimension – in my case the wider field of EUropean external(ized) border control, which is the context that the reports exist in and the interviewees work – would have been interesting to examine more in depth, it is outside the scope of the dissertation. Below follows an explanation of how I have chosen to employ Fairclough’s methodological approach, focusing on themes in the reports and the discursive practices in them.

I draw on Fairclough’s (2015) definition of discursive practice as processes relating to the production and consumption of the text. The focus on discursive practice is motivated by the research questions, and will help shed light on how securitization is both discursively constructed in Frontex’s border knowledge and mediated by actors in this field. Billig (1995, p. 94, emphasis added) emphasizes that to study the banal it is necessary to focus on “familiar habits of language” and discursive formations, “drawing out the… assumptions within their conventional usage”. By also focusing on the reception of discourse, I contribute empirically to CDA, where this aspect is often neglected (Cameron, 2001; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), as well as the Copenhagen School, where the role of the audience is under-researched (Aradau, 2004; Balzacq, 2005, Côté, 2016). I use discursive practice as an analytical tool to interpret the ways in which Frontex’s risk analysis reports securitize migration. Discursive practice reconciles my focus on both discourses and practices, bringing CDA and the Paris School together by examining the way that discourse is used in Frontex’s risk
analysis reports. This operationalization aligns with Bigo’s (2002, p. 73) focus on how discourse “works in practice” and CDA’s emphasis on “the functioning of discourse” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 18).

To identify the different discursive practices that Frontex draws on to securitize migration, I did a systematic and detailed reading of the risk analysis reports, which I coded and categorized into different themes. This made it easier to discern the most frequently occurring discursive practices in them. My theoretical framework guided the identification of the discursive practices, as I looked for the particular ways in which migration was discursively constructed as a ‘security threat’ in the reports. A close attention to the language in the reports and the way that migration is described thus helped me locate the most common discursive practices that Frontex draws on in securitizing migration, which include: construction, reproduction, inflation, obscuring, and inversion. These refer to the linguistic ways in which Frontex’s border knowledge constructs risk, crisis, and humanitarianism. Similar discursive practices have been highlighted in both securitization theory (Bigo, 2002; Buzan et al., 1998) and literature on EU border control, including by Campesi (2022), Horii (2016), and Paul (2018) on Frontex’s risk analyses; Aas and Gundhus (2015) and Léonard and Kaunert (2020) on Frontex’s operations; Glouftsios (2023b) on Frontex’s response to the 2020 pushback allegations; and Scheel (2022) on the EU’s visa regime.

By construction I mean how the reports discursively construct refugees and migrants’ riskiness by drawing on a security discourse in describing their mobility. With reproduction I mean how the reports, in turn, reproduce the risks posed by them and the crises at the external(ized) border. Inflation refers to how the reports systematically exaggerate the migratory ‘pressure’ at the borders and as such the scope of the threat that it presumably poses. By obscuring I mean the way that the reports consistently leaves out anything relating to the risks that refugees and migrants encounter at the external(ized) border, and with inversion I refer to how the reports portray crises as normal rather than exceptional and border control as humanitarian. The two first discursive practices were inspired by the methodological framework’s emphasis on discursive constructions (Fairclough, 2015; Hacking, 1986; Haslanger, 2012); the third by the literature on crisis (Mainwaring, 2019; Perkowski et al., 2023); the fourth by the theoretical framework (see Billig, 1995, “forgetting”; Bigo, 2002, “denial”) and literature on obscuring (see Glouftsios, 2023b, “obfuscation”; Scheel, 2022, “non-knowledge”); and the last by the notions of reversal in Wodak’s (2020) work and inversion in Lewis Carroll’s looking-glass world. The analysis focuses on how these discursive practices operate in the different themes.
In the processing of the material, I further identified *securitizing themes* in Frontex’s risk analysis reports. The identification of themes is a linguistic tool in the first dimension of Fairclough’s (1992, p. 236) three-dimensional model, which involves analyzing the text’s thematic structure and the assumptions underpinning it. Many discourse analytical approaches, including Fairclough himself, focus mostly on the linguistic features of the text. As this is more suited for an analysis of a smaller sample of texts, I have chosen to focus instead on the *dominant themes* in the reports and how these take shape. The research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review helped me narrow down what I was looking for in the reports, which included different themes relating to security, crisis, and humanitarianism. This initial scan of the material included coding the reports according to these three overarching subject areas. After this, it became easier to identify the most relevant themes within these areas in which migration is securitized. In examining the themes, I paid attention to how Frontex draws on the different discursive practices to securitize migration, and classified securitization’s form (banal/explicit) and degree (moderate/intense).

In total, 11 themes were identified, which were categorized into three groups: themes in which risk is constructed, themes where crisis is constructed, and themes where humanitarianism is constructed. This division was made in order to examine the role of Frontex’s construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism in securitizing migration and *normalizing* securitization. The first group of themes include the following: a detached and de-humanizing discourse; mobility as inherently risky; constructing criminalizing categories; the irregular/regular binary; risk analysis as the panacea; the migration-asylum-crime nexus; and the migration-terrorism nexus. The second group includes: the (re)production and inflation of irregularity, risk, and crisis; and the construction and normalization of crises. The third group includes: inverted humanitarian border control; and securitized humanitarian crisis discourse. Similar themes have been noted in the securitization literature (Huysmans, 2006; Guild, 2009; van Munster, 2009); literature on Frontex’s risk analyses (Follis, 2018; Paul, 2017); and on crises (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014, 2016; Rhinard, 2019).

The themes were inspired by the theoretical framework’s emphasis on the banal (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995), the methodological framework’s focus on discursive constructions (Fairclough, 2015; Hacking, 1999), and literature on the de-politicizing effects of technical expertise (Campesi, 2022; Fjørtoft, 2022); the productive role of risk and crisis (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014, 2016; Perkowski et al., 2023); gendered and raced constructions of vulnerability (Aradau, 2004; Williams, 2016); and the production of non-knowledge.
(Glouftsios, 2023b; Scheel, 2022). Billig (1995, p. 175) calls for more empirical research on the banal, including constructing “taxonomies of flaggings [of nationalism]… to list the different genres and their customary rhetorical strategies; and the extent of flaggings in different domains”. Through the identification of themes in Frontex’s risk analysis reports and the discursive practices undergirding them, the dissertation thus contributes empirically to research on the banal.

The analysis of the interviews focuses on how key actors in the field of European external(ized) border control negotiate the discourses produced by Frontex. Although they might have read Frontex’s risk analysis reports to varying extents, the important role afforded to these in this field means that civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials must engage with Frontex’s border knowledge (see Côté, 2016). The interviews were coded according to three overarching codes: security, crisis, and humanitarianism. Afterwards, the most prominent themes within these areas were identified, including: blame shifting and (de)politicization of border control, normalizing inverted humanitarian border control, and resisting and reproducing crises. The first theme relates to how the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials attempt to either politicize or de-politicize border control in order to shift blame for suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border. The second theme concerns how they, including civil society actors, reproduce the care and control duality in Frontex’s border knowledge and normalize non-rescue and push and pullbacks at the external(ized) border. The third theme regards how civil society actors unwittingly reproduce the securitized crisis discourse in this field.

The analysis of the interviews focuses both on how migration is securitized in these themes and whether and how it is normalized among the interviewees. The latter is analyzed in terms of their discursive resistance (see Figure 5). I draw on Billig’s (1995) emphasis on citizens’ passive forgetting of nationalism in explaining civil society actors’ banal securitization, and Bigo’s (2002, p. 66) “policies of denial, of active forgetting” (Bigo, 2002, p. 66) on part of the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials, who more frequently and overtly securitized migration.29

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29 See Borrelli (2018, p. 95, emphasis added) for “ignorance as an (un)conscious bureaucratic strategy” among migration officers and border guards to cope with their work.
**Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity**

The concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity will be used to examine how Frontex and the interviewees reproduce the securitization of migration by drawing on the same discourses of security, crisis, and humanitarianism. These concepts complement the focus on discursive practice since:

Analysis of discursive practice focuses on how authors of texts draw on *already existing discourses*... to create a text, and on how receivers of texts also apply *available discourses*... in the consumption and interpretation of the texts. (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 69, emphases added)

Intertextuality is the link between discursive practice and the text itself, while interdiscursivity attends to “which types of discourse... are drawn upon and how they are combined” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). Intertextuality refers to how texts draw on other texts (Fairclough, 2015, p. 37; see also Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), and will be used to analyze how Frontex’s risk analysis reports continue to portray a crisis at the external(ized) border after 2015 despite a significant drop in arrivals, with the new reports building on the crisis construction of the previous ones. Interdiscursivity refers to how different discourses influence each other, becoming articulated in new ways or used in new contexts (Fairclough, 2015, p. 38; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 73). This will be used to examine how the discourses of security, crisis, and humanitarianism are reproduced in Frontex’s border knowledge.

Power is important in both processes, with the borrowing from other texts and discourses being “tied to and constrained by... hegemony and *hegemonic struggle*” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 37, emphasis added). While intertextuality focuses on the textual dimension in Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, interdiscursivity lifts our gaze to the discursive practice dimension, making the connection between texts and social structures. A high level and novel mixing of texts and discourses signify discursive and social change, while a low level and conventional mixing indicate “the stability of the dominant order of discourse and thereby the dominant social order” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 73). The concepts are thus suited for analyzing both discursive struggle and change, with the latter being analyzed:

In terms of the creative *mixing* of discourses and genres in texts, which over time leads to the restructuring of relationships between different discursive practices within and across institutions. (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 399, emphasis added)
Intertextuality and interdiscursivity will be used to examine how the discourses of security, crisis, and humanitarianism converge over time in Frontex’s risk analysis reports and the field of EUropean external(ized) border control, which leads to the normalization of securitization. Drawing on Fairclough’s (2015, p. 38) concept of re-contextualization, I conceptualize Frontex’s mixing of these disparate discourses as discourse co-optation (Jensen, 2016), highlighting the process by which the logics and elements of one discourse is brought to another, even if they conflict with each other (see also Bernstein, 1990). This concept is helpful in examining where discourses “come from, where they go, and how they get there” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 38), and will be used to examine how Frontex’s border knowledge draws on a humanitarian discourse in order to portray increased border controls as a commonsensical response to irregularized migration.

**Normalization of Discourse**

Lastly, I draw on Fairclough’s (2015) notions of naturalization of discourse (what I call normalization) and generation of hegemonic ‘common sense’. The latter is key in the analysis of discourse since discourses draw on taken for granted assumptions which sustain existing power relations (Fairclough, 2015, p. 101). Despite being an elusive phenomenon, ‘common sense’ forms part of expectations, shapes interpretations, and lays the groundwork for (inter)actions (Fairclough, 2015). That does not mean that it cannot be questioned or that there is only one dominating ‘common sense’, however, but that we need to pay attention to how it operates in and through discourse and be aware of which ‘common sense’ is dominant in a given context at a certain point in time, such as the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. Since there is always some diversity and struggle among the reigning ‘common senses’ in a society, it becomes possible for researchers to keep a critical distance towards the ones under study (Fairclough, 2015, p. 108). Because ‘common sense’ derives from a variety of sources, it needs to be constantly (re)produced and agreed upon in order to survive. As Fairclough (2015, p. 102) points out, bringing ‘common sense’ into the foreground is important since it is most effective when it is least visible.

The current ‘common sense’ in a context thus represents the successful monopoly of a certain ideology presenting itself to be “neutral” (Fairclough, 2015). This makes it crucial to scrutinize the implicit ‘common sense’ in discourses, since it “‘impose[s] assumptions’ upon text interpreters and text producers… without either being aware of it” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 106, emphasis in original). As Billig (1995, p. 49, emphasis added) points out, flaggings of
nationalism “occur beyond the level of outward argument. It is ingrained into the very rhetoric of common sense”, which provides its “linguistic resources”. The dissertation attempts to draw out the underlying assumptions in Frontex’s border knowledge and this field, such as mobility being inherently risky. Bringing to light the hegemonic ‘common sense’ of migration being a security threat is key to expose its counterproductive and harmful effects and replacing it with another ‘common sense’ where migration is de-securitized.

The generation of hegemonic ‘common sense’ can be studied by focusing on the process of naturalization of discourse, which Fairclough (2015, p. 113) defines as the discursive naturalization of ideologies into elements of ostensibly non-ideological ‘common sense’ (see Krzyzanowski, 2020a, 2020b, for the normalization of racism among right-wing populist parties in Poland; or Wodak, 2020, for the normalization of right-wing extremist terminology in Europe). If one discourse comes to dominate within an institution (such as Frontex) or field, suppressing all other (counter)discourses, “then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary (in the sense of being one among several possible ways of ‘seeing’ things) and will come to be seen as natural, and legitimate” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 113, emphases added). Thus, when a discourse becomes normalized it “appears to be neutral in the struggle for power” and gets “placed outside of ideology”, for eventually to become ‘common sense’ (Fairclough, 2015, p. 113, emphasis added).

The normalization of discourse will be used to analyze the incremental normalization of securitization in Frontex’s border knowledge and the field of EUropean external(ized) border control over time, where deadly border fences and surveillance tools have become endemic (cf. Krzyzanowski et al., 2023, “manufacturing normality”). As Bigo (2002, p. 66, emphasis added) points out, securitization can only be challenged by “analyzing the conditions under which the authority of truth is given to a discourse”. This will be done by examining the hegemony of the security discourse in this field and the weak resistance among key actors, both of which are central components in the process of normalization. The degree of normalization in a field also depends on the standing and resources of the actor(s) promulgating the discourse (cf. the Copenhagen School’s emphasis on the authority of the securitizing actor):

What comes to be common sense is… in large measure determined by who exercises power and domination in a society or social institution. (Fairclough, 2015, p. 113, emphasis added)
This justifies the focus on Frontex and DG Home officials, since they are central actors in European external(ized) border control and can be expected to influence the dominating discourses, practices, and ‘common senses’ in this field. Being a difficult concept to operationalize, the normalization of securitization will be analyzed by focusing on: the frequency and degree in which Frontex’s risk analysis reports securitize migration; and the presence of counter-discourses and practices in this field and resistance among civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials themselves. When there is a high frequency and degree of securitization and low resistance and number of counter-discourses we have normalization; when there is a high degree of both we have discursive struggle; when there is a low degree of both securitization is not hegemonic; and when there is a low frequency and degree of securitization and high resistance and number of counter-discourses there is no normalization (see Figure 5).

This operationalization links back to the Copenhagen School’s institutionalization of securitization (Buzan et al., 1998), the Paris School’s focus on routine forms of securitization (Bigo, 2002), and Billig’s (1995) emphasis on daily flaggings of nationalism – all of which deal with our taken for granted assumptions.

![Figure 5: Normalization of securitization (author’s elaboration).](image-url)
**Selection of Material**

Frontex’s annual risk analysis reports from 2010 to 2021 comprise the main empirical material for the critical discourse analysis. They are among the few annual publications since Frontex’s creation, which allows for a systematic analysis of them over time. Before Frontex’s establishment of a public register of documents in 2022 upon recommendation by the European Ombudsman (2021), the risk analysis reports were also some of the few publicly available documents on Frontex’s website, apart from ad-hoc research studies, Management Board conclusions, and press releases. The annual risk analysis reports were chosen since they are Frontex’s flagship publications, providing an ostensibly comprehensive overview of the migratory situation at the external(ized) border. The reports thus provide a window into not only how Frontex views irregularized migration but the ways in which it discursively securitizes it.

While it might seem obvious that a security discourse prevails in a border agency’s risk analysis reports, I do not seek to establish whether migration is securitized but to examine how it is securitized, by focusing on their construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism. Considering Frontex’s emerging yet largely unrecognized role as a knowledge producer in the field of European external(ized) border control (Campesi, 2022; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2017), the reports are seen as key documents in which to examine the discursive practices Frontex draws on in framing migration as a ‘security threat’. The time period 2010–2021 was chosen since reports from 2004–2009 are not available on Frontex’s website or in the register of documents. A public access to document request was submitted to Frontex’s new Transparency Office, upon which I received heavily redacted reports with a strongly worded copyright claim (a formulation which the European Ombudsman, 2021, p. 2, has called a “legal threat”; see also Statewatch, 2021). These documents are thus not referred to.30

Other official EU documents relating to external border control were included to provide the context in which Frontex’s border knowledge is situated (in line with Fairclough’s, 2015, three-dimensional model). This includes: Frontex’s

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30 A three-pages long justifications legend was attached, justifying the expunging of certain parts on the grounds of security and privacy since it included “sensitive operational information”, details on “vulnerable” sections of the external border, and restricted information on cooperation with third countries. Frontex has been criticized by civil society actors and the European Ombudsman for its lack of transparency and handling of requests for public access to documents, and the Ombudsman has called for Frontex to drop its restrictive copyright claim, which goes against EU rules on public access to documents (with the applicant prohibited from sharing or freely using the disclosed documents) and is more restrictive than that of other EU institutions (European Ombudsman, 2021, p. 2; Statewatch, 2021).
regulations, the Schengen Borders Code, the 2014 sea borders regulation, the public hearings of the European Parliament LIBE committee’s Frontex Scrutiny Group in 2021, the scrutiny group’s final report, and the Frontex Management Board’s own investigative report. While the first three provide the legal framework for Frontex’s work and serve more as a background to the analysis, the three latter were chosen since they relate to the 2020 pushback allegations in the Aegean Sea and as such allow for analysis of how push and pullbacks have become increasingly normalized in this field.

Interviews

The Constructivist Interview Approach

The last few decades have seen the emergence of new approaches to interviewing that move away from the conventional form of standardized, closed question surveys, including romanticist approaches embracing in-depth and narrative interviews and constructivist approaches such as discourse analytical interviews and active interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, 2001). The dissertation employs a combination of the two latter since they have similar ontological and epistemological assumptions and complement each other. Constructivist interview approaches distinguish themselves from neo-positivist ones that focus on the ‘neutral’ role of the interviewer who asks questions in an unbiased way to not contaminate the responses of the interviewee, generating supposedly reliable and valid results. In contrast, the constructivist approach treats the interview as dialogue between more or less equal partners, with the interviewee perceived as an active co-producer of knowledge rather than a passive “repository of facts”, consciously mediating the responses s/he conveys (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, p. 9). Questions of ‘contamination’ are hence not as pertinent, since the interviewee cannot ‘’spoil’ what he or she is, in effect, subjectively creating” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, p. 8, emphasis added).

The constructivist approach to interviewing thus draws attention to the construction of meaning that takes place during interviews, allowing me to analyze how the interviewees draw on different discourses to understand their work and role in this field. From a discourse analytical perspective, the focus is hence not just on ‘what’ (i.e., the content) is being said but also ‘how’ (the way accounts are delivered) it is being said. This is important since “understanding how the meaning-making process unfolds in the interview is as critical as apprehending what is substantively asked and conveyed” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, p. 4, emphasis added). My approach is thus somewhere between the
positivist and dialogical one, not taking what the interviewees say as ‘the truth’ but neither elaborating on my co-creative role in their answers. Being in line with the dissertation’s critical constructivist approach, this framework will be helpful in analyzing how the interviewees rationalize the discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism promulgated by Frontex’s border knowledge.

The Role of the Interviews

The interviews constitute the second dimension (discursive practice) of Fairclough’s (2015) three-dimensional model and are important for examining how the actors in the field of European external(ized) border control resist or reproduce the securitization of migration, and as such contribute to its normalization. Whereas the analysis of Frontex’s risk analysis reports is concerned with the production of securitization, the interviews contribute to an understanding of how securitization is consumed by actors in this field. The focus on border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials is motivated by the theoretical framework, with the Paris School arguing that securitization takes place through the everyday routine work carried out by security professionals in the security field (Bigo, 2013).

The border guards and DG Home officials are part of the risk analysis reports’ target audience (personal communication, 20/4/23), whereas civil society actors were included in order to analyze securitization’s normalization beyond these state actors. They are treated as an audience of Frontex’s border knowledge since they all operate in the same field, which is influenced by Frontex’s risk analysis reports. The field of European external(ized) border control thus defines the boundaries of the audience (see Côté, 2016), with the analysis focusing on these actors’ negotiation of securitization amongst themselves and how they draw upon security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses to rationalize their own work. The interviews hence complement the analysis of Frontex’s border knowledge, contributing to a more nuanced analysis of how migration is securitized in this field by including the actors’ own voices rather than just focusing on their organization’s official discourses and practices. The interviewees are treated as representatives of their respective organizations, which was the context in which they were interviewed. This does not mean that their accounts necessarily represent that of their employers, however.

The interviews were semi-structured, and the interviewees were informed that it was open for them to talk freely about their work and experiences related to border control. The main themes that I was interested in getting them to explore
were the role of Frontex in this field; elements of security, crisis, and humanitarianism; and the development of EU migration policies and border controls over the last decade. Concrete questions related to their everyday work and challenging aspects of it, their professional opinion about Europe’s response to the 2015 ‘crisis’, and lessons learned (see Bigo, 2014, for a similar study; or Ekstedt, forthcoming, for how EUAA caseworkers deal with working in a normatively complex field). The interview guide was tailored to each interviewee and their professional background, depending on whether it was a civil society actor, border guard, Frontex, or DG Home official. The three latter were probed how they reconciled border control with fundamental rights in their everyday work and what they made of civil society actors’ critique of restrictive border controls; whereas civil society actors were asked about their take on Europe’s response to the 2015 ‘crisis’, Frontex’s growth, and their own role in this field. I expected the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials to be more sympathetic to the security discourse than civil society actors, but I was interested in seeing how it was justified by the interviewees themselves.

Because of international travel restrictions and social distancing measures between 2020–21 during the Covid19 pandemic, the interviews were carried out remotely through Zoom, Skype, or over the phone. When first contacted, the interviewees were asked if they were willing to participate in a one-hour interview as part of a PhD project on EU border control and Frontex. At the beginning of the interview, they were provided more details about the aims of the research, the form of the interview, that participation was voluntary, that they could withdraw their consent at any time without giving a reason, that they would be pseudonymized, and that their personal data would be handled in accordance with the GDPR and Malmö university’s guidelines on data protection. The interviews lasted between 45–60 minutes and were carried out in English and Norwegian/Swedish (with the border guards). They were all recorded, transcribed in verbatim, and coded. The recordings were deleted afterwards, and the contact list was stored on an encrypted USB in a locker that only I had access to. No personal information except for contact details were stored and no sensitive information was systematically gathered from the participants.

**Interview Panel**

A total of 36 interviews were conducted, comprising civil society actors (19), border guards (7), Frontex (5), and DG Home (5) officials (see appendix for full list). Due to difficulties of getting access to the three latter, no strict criteria were applied in the selection of interviewees, which built on a flexible snowballing
approach. Scandinavian border and coast guards were included due to issues of access to standing corps officers through Frontex’s press office, which all interview requests go through. Because of Frontex’s lack of cooperation in providing contact details for potential interviewees (including both seconded border guards and HQ staff), I contacted the Swedish border police (Gränspolisen region syd) and coast guard (Kustbevakningen) directly, who referred me to officers who had been seconded to Frontex operations. The inclusion of Scandinavians is thus a coincidence of me being situated in the Öresund region, which made it easier to get in touch with the Swedish border and coast guards and presumably enticed them to accept the interview request. The Danish police officer was referred to me through snowballing and the Portuguese navy officer seconded to EUNAVFOR MED was found through LinkedIn.

For the Frontex officials, the two main divisions working with risk analysis, surveillance, and operational planning were targeted, and LinkedIn was used to search for relevant officials since there are no names on Frontex’s website. The process was time-consuming and the response rate low, but in the end interviews were conducted with officials from the Situational Awareness and Monitoring Division and the Operational Response Division. Three interviews were conducted at managerial level in the former, from the Operational Analysis sector (under the Risk Analysis Unit) and the Vulnerability Assessment Unit; and one in the latter, from the Operational Planning and Evaluation Sector (under the Field Operations Unit). One former official from the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) was also interviewed, and I had an informal conversation with a Nordic Management Board representative. Interviews with DG Home officials were conducted from different units and sectors that fall under the two directorates that deal with border and migration control: Home.B Schengen, Borders and Visa and Home.C Migration and Asylum. Three interviews were conducted under the former, from the units B.1 Schengen and External Borders, B.2 Schengen Governance, and B.4 Visa Policy. Two interviews were conducted under Home.C, from the units C1. Irregular Migration and Returns and C.2 Legal Pathways and Integration. Many declined the interview request citing a heavy workload or because they did not see the relevance of my topic to their work (e.g., the Asylum Unit). This forced me to maintain a broad focus and see the links between the siloed work of the Commission, despite the interviewees themselves

31 The organizational structure of both Frontex and DG Home has undergone several changes during the writing of the dissertation. The names of the various divisions, units, and sectors are from November 2022 and correspond to the organizational charts in the appendix.
not seeing any connection between legal pathways, visa policy, and asylum on one hand and ‘irregular’ migration and external borders on the other hand.

Among civil society actors, organizations represented in Frontex’s Consultative Forum (CF) were targeted. Out of the 13 different organizations in the forum in January 2020, access was obtained to six of them: FRA, UNHCR, Council of Europe (CoE), IOM, OSCE/ODIHR, and the Red Cross EU Office. In addition, NGOs that were created in the wake of the 2015 ‘crisis’ were interviewed, including: Drop in the Ocean, Samos Volunteers, Aegean Boat Report, SOS Mediterranee, and AlarmPhone Sahara. The purpose of this variety of actors was to get different perspectives, from experienced career professionals at the CoE and ODIHR (INGOs); to desk-based project officers at the IOM and UNHCR (IOs); and volunteers involved in work on the ground (NGOs). The sample thus covers a range of different civil society actors in this field, including UN-affiliated migration and refugee agencies; large SAR organizations in the Mediterranean and the Sahara; and smaller NGOs with operations across Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Poland.

Two interviews were conducted with INGOs: one with an official at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR); and one at the Council of Europe (CoE), Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees. For IOs, one interview was conducted with the UNHCR liaison office to Frontex and four with the IOM. The latter includes one from the Missing Migrants project at the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) and three from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) country offices Europe, MENA, and West and Central Africa. For NGOs, two interviews were conducted with the SAR organization SOS Mediterranee, one rescuer and one management-level representative; one with AlarmPhone Sahara, the sister organization of Watch the Med/AlarmPhone; two with the grassroot organization Samos Volunteers on the Greek island of Samos; one with the Norwegian NGO Aegean Boat Report (ABR); four with the Norwegian NGO Drop in the Ocean; and one with the Red Cross EU Office. The interviewees were found on the website of their respective organization and contacted by email.

Although the total interview sample is large for a qualitative study, the number of interviewees from each organization is limited. This impacts the representativeness of the sample and generalizability of the results, especially when it comes to whether securitization is normalized among key actors in this field. This will be revisited in the conclusion.
Fieldwork

A short period of fieldwork, in the form of participant observation, was conducted in two different locations. This method was chosen to add an on the ground perspective to the study of civil society actors’ practices in the field of European external(ized) border control, and how they reinforce the security discourse. As an inductive approach, ethnographic fieldwork provides firsthand observations of a phenomenon and has become increasingly common in migration studies. Participant observation was chosen since “the field researcher can only get close to the lives of those studied by actively participating in their day-to-day affairs” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 3, emphasis added), which is “essential if we are to grasp a number of basic issues in everyday social life and its routine conduct” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 12, emphasis added). The object of study is thus people’s everyday lives or practices in concentrated communities (Emerson et al., 2011), with an emphasis on “the significance of the local, the concrete and the practical” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 14, emphases in original).

I combine this micro-level approach with the macro-level analytical focus on the dominating discourses and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism in this field, heeding calls that ethnography should not “remain fixed at the local level” but move the analysis up to the “generic level” to build theory (Atkinson, 2015, p. 14). Fieldwork can be combined with CDA since Fairclough’s (2015) dialectical approach understands the social world as both constituted by discourse and constitutive of it, which means that there are practices existing outside of discourse that need to be studied by other tools than discourse analysis. It also fits with my conceptualization of field, adding an understanding of the social practice or context in which these discourses exist (the third dimension in Fairclough’s analytical model). Participant observation was conducted with the NGO Drop in the Ocean in its locations on Lesvos (Greece) and in Krakow (Poland) to get a better understanding of how it operates in these ‘crisis’ sites and how the volunteers make sense of the environment in which they work. The fieldwork comprised five weeks of volunteering on Lesvos in April-May 2021 and one week in Krakow in April 2022.

Drop in the Ocean was originally one out of several NGOs chosen but the Covid19 pandemic interrupted the planned fieldwork, which was supposed to be longer and multi-sited. The NGO is one of many that emerged in response to the 2015 ‘crisis’, being started by a Norwegian woman, Trude Jacobsen, who traveled to Lesvos that summer with bags full of clothes for the people arriving. Being surprised by the lack of humanitarian assistance on the island, she left her
job and started Drop in the Ocean “to make it easier for ordinary people... to travel to Greece and assist people forced to flee” (Drop in the Ocean, 2022, para. 1). The NGO was chosen since it represents a typical case of citizen-led initiatives and can be understood as contributing to the dominant crisis discourse and practices in this field through its temporary and emergency-oriented activities (see also Mogstad, 2021). Drop in the Ocean operates both inside and outside refugee camps on the Aegean islands and on the Greek mainland, in the beginning spotting boats, helping with disembarkation, and distributing food and clothes; and after a few years expanding its activities to include language learning, computer classes, mother and baby activities, sports for unaccompanied minors, and creating social meeting spaces for the camp residents (Drop in the Ocean, 2022).

The NGO has seen a steady expansion of its operations over the years, being present in Bosnia and Hercegovina since 2019, Krakow since March 2022, and Oslo from May 2022. It is thus a representative example of a smaller NGO working in this field, constantly adapting to changes in its environment. The island of Lesvos was chosen since it was at the center of the 2015 ‘crisis’, seeing a sustained number of arrivals over the years and hosting Europe’s largest refugee camp in 2020. After the Moria camp burned down in September that year, Drop in the Ocean had to reduce its operations due to the Greek government’s new policy of registration of volunteers and permission of only ‘essential activities’ in the new camp. Merely a few weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the NGO opened a clothes distribution warehouse in Krakow for Ukrainians fleeing the war. This location was thus chosen to directly observe Drop in the Ocean’s crisis response, which at the time involved approximately 3 million Ukrainians fleeing to Poland alone (already three times as many than what came to Europe in 2015). A secondary objective was to observe developments in the workings of the NGO, which responded to this crisis in the same short-term oriented way as to the 2015 one, with the provision of basic necessities.

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32 Since 2023, Drop in the Ocean has closed down its operations in all sites except for Greece due to lack of funding.
Ethical Reflections

This final section discusses ethical concerns relating to the dissertation’s critical constructivist approach and how it deals with reflexivity and positionality.

Ethics in Constructivist Interview Approaches

Conducting interviews entails ethical requirements regarding prior, voluntary, explicit, and informed consent; anonymity and confidentiality (Israel, 2015; Lag, 2003; Shamoo & Resnik, 2015); and the proper storing of data and personal information (GDPR, 2016). In addition to these legal requirements, constructivist interview approaches pose additional concerns due to the emphasis on studying “displays of discursive practices” (Hammersley, 2014, p. 529) rather than the interviewees’ own experiences, which is difficult to resolve due to the approach’s ontological and epistemological premises. This can be problematic since interviewees have expectations regarding how the information that they provide will be treated by the researcher and because they should be informed about what will be done with this (Hammersley, 2014, p. 530). If researchers interpret the data in such a way that the interviewees do not recognize themselves, the question arises as to how informed their consent is and whether they would have agreed to be interviewed in the first place if they knew what would happen to the material (Hammersley, 2014, p. 531).

This ethical concern arises especially in research where the substance of ‘what’ interviewees say is treated as less important than the way (i.e., ‘how’) they say it (Hammersley, 2014). Hammersley (2014, pp. 530–531) argues that since critical constructivist approaches have an “explicit commitment to challenging the dominant ideology, and the institutional patterns and practices it legitimates”, the interviewees representing these tend to be treated as “discursively performing” an account that should be scrutinized. In my case, this is the case for the interviews with border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials in their capacity as representatives of their organization, which is understood to be promulgating a security discourse. I would argue that this element of ‘deceit’ does not only present itself in critical constructivist approaches, however, but is an ethical concern that all researchers need to grapple with since interviews are always analyzed according to researchers’ hypotheses and theories. Researchers invariably bring their own ideas to the material, even if only subconsciously (see Billig’s, 1995, discussion of nationalism scholars). What is important is to bring an “open mind” rather than an “empty mind” to the analysis (Atkinson, 2015, p. 58).
However, I acknowledge that this ethical dilemma is more pressing in critical constructivist approaches than positivist ones, for example. Hammersley (2014, pp. 531, 533, 537) discusses several solutions, including having a participatory research design, doing an extensive debrief after the interview, only using naturally occurring data, or re-evaluating the rigor in which ethical concerns are applied depending on the context, seriousness of the issue, and the harm caused to the respondents. I have followed the latter approach since it is more flexible, recognizing that some ethical issues might not be possible to eliminate but should rather be continuously reflected on (see Israel, 2015). Since constructivist interviews do not cause harm to its respondents, a certain level of ‘deceit’ is permissible as long as the implications of the research for the interviewees is made clear to them (Hammersley, 2014; Shamoo & Resnik, 2015). Hammersley’s (2014) “element of deceit” does not apply to the same extent to the dissertation, however, since I focus both on how accounts are delivered by the interviewees but also on the substance of what they say (see Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, 2001). Moreover, expert interviews, such as with the Frontex and DG Home officials, require me to maintain a critical distance in order to not reproduce their accounts. These interviewees all had years if not decades of experience, and largely supported the work of their organization. The power relationship between the researcher and the interviewee in these situations is more equal than in interviews with vulnerable groups (Israel, 2015; Lahman, 2018), making it a case of ‘studying up’ rather than ‘down’.33

It is also not clear that this “element of deceit” violates the ethical principles of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice (Israel, 2015; Shamoo & Resnik, 2009). Since I obtained the interviewees’ consent it can be argued that their autonomy is respected, in that they voluntarily chose to partake in the study. There is also no element of “coercion or undue influence”, since I have no prior relation to any of them and did not provide compensation for participation (Shamoo & Resnik, 2015, p. 264). The non-maleficence principle is similarly upheld as no harm incurred the interviewees because of their participation in the study, and the justice principle is respected since they were treated equally and fairly. The beneficence principle was arguably met since most of them expressed that they found it rewarding to contribute with their expertise to a research project. The ethical principles of honesty and respect for research subjects (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009) were also maintained, as I tried to be transparent about

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33 Most of the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials were white and middle-aged, and the former mostly men. There was more gender and age diversity among the civil society actors, especially the NGOs.
my research with the interviewees and treated them respectfully. In terms of respect for the law and social responsibility, no laws were broken by this “element of deceit”, which rather contributes to “promote good social consequences” by challenging prevailing power structures that are (re)produced by the interviewees (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009, p. 29).

This touches upon the ethical dilemma of “the good of the individual and the good of society” (Shamoo & Resnik 2015, p. 255), where the researcher must strike a balance. The risk vs. benefit calculation weighs in favor of the latter in my case, as the risk (of ‘deceit’) to interviewees is considered minor and part of most of interview approaches, being outweighed by the value of the research (highlighting the counterproductive and harmful effects of securitization) and benefits to society (less deadly border controls). Similar arguments have been made in favor of conducting “covert research”, which in some cases is the only way to expose the inner workings of secretive law enforcement agencies or state violence (Israel, 2015, p. 10). This is where the principle of integrity comes in, where it falls upon the researcher to demonstrate balanced, fair, and sound judgement, not presenting a skewed version of the material. I believe that I have managed to do so by focusing on both the interviewees’ reproduction and resistance of securitization, which is a more nuanced analysis than traditionally found in the securitization literature. The topics discussed with the interviewees mostly related to their work and were not particularly sensitive or private. They were also seen as capable of providing consent, being educated individuals able to understand the potential risks of participating in research projects that are critical of current policies and practices (Israel, 2015; Shamoo & Resnik, 2015).

Furthermore, informed consent was treated as a continuous process rather than the standard “show, tell and sign” procedure (Israel, 2015, p. 189). This involved obtaining the interviewees’ prior approval for the use of quotes (from those who requested it) and the sharing of the dissertation with those interested upon completion. The former gives them control of how their data is used and the latter includes them in the outcome of their input. Finally, the project was vetted by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Etikprövningsmyndigheten), which means that it is found to meet the requirements of Swedish law regarding research with human subjects (Lag, 2003, p. 460).
Responsibility and the Role of the Researcher in Critical Constructivist Approaches – Between Complicity and Critique?

Irregularity is no more than a *disjunction* between the state’s authorization and an individual’s presence (Campesi, 2022, p. 21, emphasis added).

This last sub-section discusses how I negotiate reflexivity and positionality, especially the balance between complicity and critique (see Kristensen, 2019, 2020), in dealing with such a contested research topic as irregularized migration. Rejecting the idea of social science as a value-neutral and objective enterprise, I align myself with critical constructivist approaches’ emphasis on scholars’ embeddedness in the social world that they analyze and how their positionality inevitably affects their research (see Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Haraway’s, 1988, “situated knowledges”). As Billig (1995, p. 127) points out, scholars of nationalism are born into the world of nation states which they seek to analyze, which blinds them to its contingency and the fact that their “words, also, reflect the conditions of their utterance”. For the dissertation, this entails a risk of uncritically reproducing the hegemonic discourses and practices in Frontex’s border knowledge and the field of European external(ized) border control. As Bigo (2013, p. 125, emphasis added) emphasizes, scholars need to “avoid the ‘essentialisation’… of the world done by the indigenous categories of each social universe” that they study. In order to do so, I have been consistent and transparent in my use of terminology, using the more encompassing terms ‘refugees and migrants’ rather than just ‘migrants’ (which deprives them of their protection needs); ‘irregularized migration’ rather than ‘irregular migration’ (which criminalizes them); and mostly writing ‘risk’, ‘crisis’, ‘security threat’, and ‘illegal’/‘irregular’ in quotation marks to not reify the terms used by Frontex and European policymakers and the securitization of migration.

I believe that a critical awareness of the choice of terminology is part of scholars’ responsibility for the impacts of their research. For example, De Genova (2002, pp. 419, 422–423, emphasis added) argues that to study “migrant illegality” constitutes “epistemic violence” since it naturalizes this state categorization rather than attending to its historical and legal production, with scholars becoming “accomplices to the discursive power of immigration law”. Migration scholars should thus not take migrant “illegality” for granted by looking for “prescriptive solutions” to this purported “problem” (De Genova, 2002, p. 21), but rather problematize their irregularization as such (see Bacchi’s, 2009, “what is the problem represented to be” approach). In the same vein, I
examine the discursive construction of migration as a ‘security threat’ rather than migration as a ‘security threat’ in order to not legitimize this particular construction. I think that being conscious of the unnaturalness of terms such as ‘irregular migration’ is a precondition for not perpetuating them.

This is important since state ascribed categorizations have become so routinely incorporated into migration scholars’ analyses that they increasingly “vanish from sight” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 304). For instance, Andersson (2017a) warns of “policy capture” of research agendas following the 2015 ‘crisis’, with researchers often being dependent on funding from the very same state bodies that they seek to scrutinize (see also ADMIGOV, 2020; Anderson 2019; Kalir & Cantat, 2020; Stierl, 2020). Similarly, Anderson (2019) argues that scholars should question not only migration policies but also migration research, considering that only a fraction of the world’s population fall under the category ‘migrant’. Düvell (2011, pp. 276, 295, emphases added), on the other hand, emphasizes “the role of the state in creating irregular immigrants”, arguing that “it is politics and law rather than the immigrants that must be held responsible for irregular migration”. Seeing migration policies as products of their time opens for alternative imaginaries of migration than securitized. Like De Genova (2002, p. 424, emphasis added) points out, “the law defines the parameters of its own operations”, constituting subjects as ‘legal’ or ‘illegal’, with “every ‘illegalization’ implying the possibility of its own rectification” (De Genova, 2002, p. 429).

Attending to the taken for granted assumptions that undergird political responses to migration is thus important since they shape their conditions of possibility. As Anderson (2019, p. 3, emphases added) observes, the “ideologically charged” migration lexicon “assumes a tension between embedded ‘natives’ and out of place ‘aliens’” that “lies at the heart of contemporary concerns about human mobility”. The dissertation hence seeks to render the invisible visible (such as banal securitization and its normalization) and the visible less spectacular (e.g., irregularized migration). This is in line CDA’s rejection of the view of science as a “mirror” to the world, since this mirror may blur as much as it reflects (Potter, 1996, p. 97). Declaring the role of one’s research as ‘neutral’ thus risks furthering the status quo rather than problematizing it. Instead, I choose a more committed approach, seeking to “do harm” to harmful knowledge practices (Stierl, 2020) by powerful actors like Frontex, which highlights the responsibility of scholars for both the knowledge that we produce but also the knowledge that we do not produce.
Engaged research is important in contemporary society, since recent years have seen an attack on critical scholarship across Europe and North America, where migration and critical race studies have been accused of being biased pseudo-science (Howell & Richter-Monpetit, 2023; Politiken, 2021; Zurcher, 2021). Right-wing policymakers have tried to discredit research that does not align itself with the ideology of populist anti-immigrant movements (Wodak, 2020), with the framing of migration as an ‘issue’ making the role of critical border and migration research all the more pressing in terms of examining the increasingly normalized xenophobic discourses that influence migration policies. As Bigo (2002, pp. 84, 87, emphases added) notes, “scholars cannot present themselves as spectators” to securitizing processes, their role is to challenge “the positions of the so-called experts and… reopen a way of thinking that they actively try to forget”. 
The state monopolization of the means of legitimate movement has… rendered individual travelers dependent on state... regulation of their movements in a manner previously unparalleled in human history. In this regard, people have... become prisoners of their identities, which may sharply limit their opportunities to come and go across jurisdictional spaces. (Torpey, 2018, p. 228, emphases added)

Just like the field of EUropean external(ized) border control is a construction of the dissertation, so are the ‘European external border’ and ‘European border control’ constructions of the EU and its member states, being (re)produced by the different discourses and practices that shape them; policies, laws; Frontex’s risk analysis activities; the bureaucratic tasks of DG Home officials; and the operations of border guards on the ground.34 This chapter historicizes the emergence of this field and Frontex, providing the political and legal context which has facilitated the securitization of migration in this field and illustrating how it has become institutionalized (Buzan et al., 1998) over time. This is in line with Foucault’s method of genealogy, and is helpful in understanding how securitization took hold in this field:

To arrive at the necessary understanding of the present we need to include analysis of its relations to the past, and... how the past and its relations to the present are represented by different social actors and agencies. We also need to include analysis of how the relations of past/present to the future are represented, because that affects what is seen as desirable and... possible. (Fairclough, 2015, p. 42, emphases added)35

34 Hellström (2006, p. 167) notes that “the construction of what we refer to as ‘Europe’ cannot be isolated from the borders that demarcate its extension”.

35 CDA has been criticized for having a narrow interpretation of history (Blommaert, 2008), however, being more concerned with recent history.
The first section traces the development of EUropean external(ized) border control, starting with the creation of the Schengen area, before moving on to the myriad policy tools developed to curb unwanted migration and the very construction of irregular entry itself. The second section sketches Frontex’s growth through no less than five regulations in less than two decades, highlighting the convergence of security, crisis, and humanitarian logics. The chapter thus serves both as a background to and analysis of how migration has become securitized in this field over time, illustrating the high degree of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in EUropean external(ized) border control, where the different policies and regulations draw on each other and the same discourses.

Towards EUropean External(ized) Border Control

An aim of European integration was to ‘take away from borders their rigidity and… intransigent hostility’. (Robert Schuman, in Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 150, emphasis added)

This section outlines how the policy area justice and home affairs (JHA) has developed in the EU, with a specific focus on border control. The overview is not intended to be exhaustive but to contextualize the field in which Frontex is situated, focusing on the larger developments in EU integration in this domain and the emerging link between migration and security.

The Creation of Schengen – Hardwiring the External Border

Europe is simultaneously a borderless utopia and a Fortress Europe. (Hellström, 2015, p. 29, emphasis added)

The 1985 Schengen agreement and its 1990 implementing convention (together forming the Schengen acquis) is a natural point of departure for an analysis of EU border and migration control since it prompted member states’ cooperation on these issues with the removal of internal border controls.36 The signatory states

36 One could start even earlier, however, with the police cooperation between European states through the TREVI group in 1976, which was later incorporated into the intergovernmental third pillar (JHA) in the 1993 Maastricht Treaty (see articles 87–89 TFEU; European Parliament, 2020a).
proclaimed that “the ever closer union of the peoples of the Member States of the European Communities should find its expression in the freedom to cross internal borders for all nationals of the Member States” (Schengen acquis, 1990/2000, p. 13, emphasis added). The Schengen acquis is celebrated as a milestone since it facilitated internal free movement and opened for cooperation on asylum policy and policing, which coincided with an increased number of asylum seekers from the Balkans in the 1990s (Hansen, 2008). However, the softening of internal border controls was accompanied by the creation of a common external border towards non-Schengen countries which became hardened (see Walters, 2002).\(^{37}\)

The Schengen acquis was also considered a prerequisite for the creation of the internal market, which was proposed in the 1987 Single European Act (Lavenex, 2014). Originally foreseen in the 1957 Rome Treaty, the Act sought to create a single European market with the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people (the “four freedoms”), which raised concerns among member states of ‘irregular’ migration and cross-border crime (Single European Act, 1987; Hansen, 2008).

These fears gave rise to the so-called “compensatory measures” of the Schengen acquis, which aimed to mitigate such threats by strengthening the external border and monitoring third country nationals’ movements within the Schengen area (through the Schengen Information System) in order to safeguard internal security (Hansen, 2008; Lavenex, 2014). As Bendel (2018, p. 294, emphasis added) points out, “security and control issues were therefore inherent in EU policies on immigration and asylum from the start”. While the establishment of the Schengen area is often heralded as the EU’s greatest achievement, it has been accompanied by an increasingly fortified external border which has significantly curtailed refugees and migrants’ access to Europe due to the introduction of strict visa requirements, carrier sanctions, and the extension of border controls into third countries (Andersson, 2016; Düvell, 2011; Shachar, 2020). Free intra EU mobility has therefore not provided equal patterns of free movement, creating hyper-mobility for some and immobility for others (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018), which is illustrated by the suffering and deaths at the gates of Europe (IOM, 2023a; Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016).

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\(^{37}\) As Hellström (2015, p. 28) notes, “Europe’s borders are simultaneously vanishing and constantly rebuilt”.

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Cooperation on Justice and Home Affairs – Institutionalizing Securitization

Securitization… is a \textit{structural unease} in a “risk society” framed by neoliberal discourses in which freedom is always associated \textit{at its limits} with danger and (in)security. (Bigo, 2002, p. 65, emphases added)

The Schengen agreement was just the start of EU-level cooperation on justice and home affairs (JHA) and has been followed by a plethora of policy tools aimed at curbing irregularized migration. The 1990 Dublin Convention (into force in 1997) was the first step towards harmonizing asylum policy at the EU-level, with its rule of “first country of arrival” still forming the basis of the EU’s asylum regime despite its in practice unequal distribution of responsibility among member states (Regulation (EU) No 604/2013; Luedtke, 2018; Niemann & Zaun, 2017; Shachar, 2020). \footnote{The Dublin regulation has been amended several times since (2003, 2013, and a failed proposed recast in 2016), latest in the Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum in 2020 (European Commission, 2020f).} Originating due to member states’ security concerns in the post-Cold War era, Dublin was couched as preventing “refugees in orbit”, “secondary movements”, and “asylum shopping” by assigning responsibility to the first member state of arrival to process the asylum application (Luedtke,
2018). These common rules have not prevented the creation of a de facto “asylum lottery” on the ground, however, with highly divergent recognition rates across member states (see e.g., Bendel, 2018).

Another milestone was the 1992 Maastricht Treaty (into force in 1993), which incorporated JHA into the EU treaty through the pillar structure, although on an intergovernmental rather than supranational basis, as with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Treaty on European Union, 1992, title VI). The treaty reaffirms member states’ “objective to facilitate the free movement of persons, while ensuring the safety and security of their peoples, by including provisions on justice and home affairs” (TEU, 1992, p. 2, emphasis added), thus illustrating the presence of security concerns from the onset of JHA cooperation. Negotiated outside of the EU framework, the Schengen acquis was incorporated into EU law through the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (into force in 1999), which also brought visa, asylum, and immigration policy under exclusive EU competences (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997, articles 73i–k). The treaty established an “area of freedom, security and justice” (AFSJ), with the objective to:

Maintain and develop the Union as an area of freedom, security and justice, in which the free movement of persons is assured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the… combating of crime. (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997, p. 8, emphasis added)

Here an explicit link is made between migration and security, with border control and free movement framed as necessary corollaries. As Bigo et al. (2016, pp. 51–52) point out, freedom and justice have always been interpreted “in the light of security” in this field, which explains the progress made in police and intelligence cooperation at the EU level and the “absence of a similar integration in the field of justice and liberty”.39 The Amsterdam Treaty further conferred the EU powers to conclude agreements with third countries for the readmission of its nationals (European Council, 1999, A. IV. 27), which has become an important tool for Europe to return rejected asylum-seekers and those staying ‘irregularly’.

JHA takes central stage in the 2007 Lisbon Treaty (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), into force in 2009), which replaces the pillar structure with the distribution of “exclusive EU competences”, “shared

39 Hellström (2006, p. 176) also notes that “the construction of Europe goes hand in hand with the ambitions to ‘boost security’ within the EU”. He argues that the AFSJ represents a “constitutive split between people who enjoy more opportunities (and protection) and to move freely around Europe and those who are increasingly isolated at their localities” (Hellström, 2006, p. 184).
competences” with member states, and “supporting competences” (articles 3, 4 and 6). Bringing JHA under the ordinary legislative procedure (article 294), the AFSJ becomes a shared competence, with the Commission having the exclusive right to propose new legislation in this policy area (article 4.2. (j)). The treaty lifted most of the restrictions to the CJEU’s jurisdiction in JHA, the Charter of Fundamental Rights became legally binding on member states (article 6.1.), the goal of “integrated border management” (IBM) became formalized (article 77c), and the accession mechanism to join Schengen became stricter, with new member states having to demonstrate tight border controls in order to be regarded as “Schengen mature” (Lavenex, 2014). The Lisbon Treaty has been seen as democratizing since it extended the ordinary legislative procedure to JHA, strengthening the powers of the European Parliament which previously only had a “right to be consulted” by the Council (Ripoll Servent, 2012).

The Lisbon Treaty also provided the European Council a prominent role in defining the strategic guidelines for legislative operational planning in the AFSJ through its multi-annual strategic programs (article 68; Hansen, 2008). The Council summit in Tampere in 1999 was the first meeting exclusively dedicated to JHA, which resulted in the Tampere Programme, with objectives of a common asylum and migration policy, a European area of justice, increased cooperation against cross-border crime, and the incorporation of JHA priorities in the EU’s external action (European Council, 1999). The nexus between migration and security is intrinsic to this policy program, which was later followed by the 2005 Hague Programme, 2009 Stockholm Programme, and similar ones in 2014 and 2019 (European Council, 2005, 2009, 2014, 2019).

The securitization of migration becomes further institutionalized (Buzan et al., 1998) with the introduction of a multitude of tools to control unwanted migration in the 2000–2010s. The Eurodac regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No 2725/2000, in force since 2003) established the European Dactyloscopy database for registering refugees and migrants’ fingerprints to facilitate the implementation of the Dublin regulation (including their return to the first country of entry, so-called “Dublin returns”) and monitor their onward movement. The recast Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 allowed law enforcement authorities access to the database, furthering the link between migration and security (see Bigo et al., 2016, for how interoperability blurs the distinction between asylum, migration, policing, and counter-terrorism).\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) The Commission launched a recast proposal in 2016 (European Commission, 2016) as part of the new CEAS reform which stalled, before launching another recast in the New Pact on Asylum and Migration (European Commission, 2020c).

Visa policy has also increasingly become used to combat irregularized migration (see Shachar, 2020), including the following: a common EU visa list, specifying non-EU countries whose nationals need a visa to enter the EU (Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001, recast Regulation (EU) 2018/1806); an EU Visa Code (Regulation (EC) No 810/2009, latest recast Regulation (EU) 2019/1155), establishing common procedures for issuing short-term visas to the Schengen area; and the Visa Information System (VIS) (Regulation (EC) No 767/2008), which facilitates the exchange of data on visa applicants to prevent “visa shopping”, fraud, and crime. The revised Visa Code has tied the EU’s visa policy closer to third countries’ border and migration control, linking lack of cooperation on returns and readmission agreements with increased costs and processing times of visa applications (see article 25a).

At the same time, efforts to control the mobility of so-called “regular passengers” have intensified, with the 2017 Entry/Exit System (EES) and 2018 European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) (both operational from 2024) to monitor the entry and exit of all travelers to Europe and screen visa-exempt travelers before entry to determine whether they pose a security, “illegal migration”, or health risk (see Regulation (EU) 2017/2226 and Regulation (EU) 2018/1240). Frontex has been tasked with developing the risk indicators for automated profiling of travelers and hosting of the ETIAS Central Unit (Campesi 2022; Vavoula, 2021), and the EES will enable monitoring of visa overstay, which is the most common mode of entry for irregularized migrants in the EU (Düvell, 2011; Frontex, 2020).

Some of these directives have been recast in the Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, including the proposed Asylum Procedures Regulation (European Commission, 2020b) and the replacement of the Temporary Protection Directive with an instrument addressing situations of crisis and force majeure, which was inspired by the Covid19 pandemic (European Commission, 2020e). This substitution of a protection mechanism with a crisis one further illustrates the institutionalization of securitization in this field.

The Schengen Borders Code – Constructing Irregular Entry

While visions of Europe without frontiers connote the free movement inside the union; the dreams of borderlessness co-exist with the building of a Fortress Europe. (Hellström, 2015, p. 28, emphasis added)

The Schengen Borders Code (SBC), adopted in 2006 (Regulation (EC) No 562/2006; recast in 2016, 2017, and proposed recast in 2021), is the main legal framework underpinning EUropean external(ized) border control. The regulation sets out common rules for border checks, entry conditions, and the temporary reintroduction of border controls (Regulation (EU) 2016/399). As the following

41 The title of the “Council Implementing Decision establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine” (Council, 2022) illustrates the discursive construction of crisis, with the very existence of this “mass influx” needing to be “established” by the EU before protection can be offered. The crisis logic also remains at the heart of the directive, with protection being time limited.
will show, however, the SBC not only harmonizes what is deemed regular contra ‘irregular’ entry at the EU-level but codifies the differential treatment of these forms of mobility and securitizes the latter.

Apart from stipulating how border checks are to be carried out, the Schengen Borders Code lays down the foundation for who can enter, how, when, and for what purposes. The following entry conditions apply for third country nationals: 1) possession of valid travel documents; 2) a visa or residence permit (if not visa-exempt); 3) ability to “justify the purpose and conditions of the intended stay” and sufficient means of subsistence; 4) must not be the subject of an alert in SIS; and 5) should not “be considered… a threat to public policy, internal security, public health or the international relations of any of the Member States” (article 6, emphasis added). While explicit security concerns are evident in the last two entry conditions, which concern the potential risk posed by people crossing the border; security concerns are implicit in the first three ones, which relate to member states’ control of who crosses the border and why (cf. Scheel and Tazzioli’s, 2022, call for not seeing “like a state”). Nevertheless, the SBC stipulates that the rules apply to anyone crossing the internal or external borders “without prejudice to… the rights of refugees… in particular as regards non-refoulement” (articles 3(b) and 4, emphasis added).

Security concerns are also present in the stipulation that the external border can only be crossed “at border crossing points and during fixed opening hours”, with penalties for “unauthorized crossings” (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, p. 9, emphases added). Although refugees should be exempted from the latter, their mobility is still irregularized if they cross between border crossing points (BCPs), which most do in order to not be detected and refused entry (see Frontex, 2021, pp. 49, 52). This provision is thus not a carte blanche for member states to push back refugees and migrants at the external border, with the SBC emphasizing that the regulation should be carried out in accordance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and fundamental rights (article 4). Border guards are also required to fill out a standardized form detailing the grounds of the refusal of entry to each person faced with such a decision, and “shall, in the performance of their duties, fully respect human dignity, in particular in cases involving vulnerable persons” and not discriminate on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity,

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42 These conditions are also the basis for refusals of entry, constituting one of Frontex’s (2017, p. 9) “indicators of irregular migration” in its risk analysis reports.
religion, disability, and age (article 7). Here we see the coalescence of securitarian and humanitarian concerns in the SBC, which illustrates a high degree of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field as the different policy instruments draw on both each other and the same discourses of security and humanitarianism.

Although third country nationals are the SBC’s main object of concern, this generalized suspicion extends towards EUropean citizens and residents as well, with the regulation stipulating that:

On a non-systematic basis, when carrying out minimum checks on persons enjoying the right of free movement under Union law, border guards may consult national and European databases in order to ensure that such persons do not represent a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat to the internal security, public policy, international relations of the Member States or a threat to the public health. (article 8(2), emphases added)

Securitization is here explicit, with this provision illustrating the inherent suspicion towards any form of mobility in this field. This link between regular mobility and security is strengthened in the 2017 amendment to the SBC (Regulation (EU) 2017/458), which mandates systematic checks against relevant databases (e.g., SIS, national databases, Interpol’s database on stolen and lost travel documents) for EUropean citizens and residents, justified by the terrorist attacks in EUrope in the mid-2010s (points 1–3, 5, article 1). These checks should not be carried out if they have “a disproportionate impact on the flow of traffic at the border” (point 11, emphasis added), however, illustrating the priority given to the freedom of movement of this category of traveler. Here the “referent object of security” (Buzan et al., 1998) becomes the external border itself rather than EUropean citizens, who could pose a threat to internal security and must also be monitored. Despite being introduced as an inconspicuous amendment, this is a crucial development in EUropean external(ized) border control, partly blurring the distinction between Union citizens and third country nationals when it comes

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43 Whether these principles are observed in practice is another matter. The Frontex official from the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) underlined that many border guards were unaware of the fundamental rights protections in the SBC, with their training having rather focused on “stopping illegal immigration” (interview 12/4/2021).

44 See Campesi (2022, pp. 183–184) for the role of these second-generation databases and the expansion of surveillance in transforming borders into an “apparatus of social differentiation” and subtle “technology of discrimination”.
to the potential risk that they pose, which contributes to normalizing securitization.

Banal securitization is further evident in the SBC’s emphasis on member states’ common responsibility for border control, asserting that it is “in the interest not only of the Member State at whose external borders it is carried out but of all Member States which have abolished internal border control” (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, p. 2, emphasis added). Illustrating the intertwining of securitarian and humanitarian discourses, border control is described as able to both “combat illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings”, to be carried out “in a professional and respectful manner” (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, p. 2, emphasis added). Security concerns still have primacy, constituting grounds for the reintroduction of temporary border controls within Schengen:

In an area without internal border control, it is necessary to have a common response to situations seriously affecting the public policy or internal security of that area… by allowing for the temporary reintroduction of internal border control in exceptional circumstances, but without jeopardizing the principle of free movement. (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, p. 3, emphases added)

Securitization is here explicit and linked with crisis, with the reintroduction of controls deemed a “measure of last resort” (cf. Buzan et al., 1998) which should be “balanced against the threat” and considered against “alternative measures which could be taken” (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, p. 3, emphases added). The SBC defines “serious threats” as “terrorist incidents” or “threats posed by organised crime”, stipulating that “migration and the crossing of external borders by a large number of third-country nationals should not, per se, be considered… a threat” (Regulation (EU) 2016/399, pp. 3–4, emphasis added; see also chapter II). Although this suggests a lack of securitization, the very existence of the SBC and the differential access to territory and scope of controls it imposes on third country nationals constitute a banal securitization of their mobility (cf. Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995). This is further evidenced by member states’ reintroduction of border controls in response to the 2015 ‘crisis’, with securitization materializing in the erection of fences across Europe to prevent refugees and migrants from entering their territory (see e.g., European Parliament, 2019, 2021j).

Here the 2013 Schengen Evaluation Mechanism (Council Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013) comes in, which is a monitoring mechanism designed to ensure member states’ compliance with the Schengen acquis, with the Commission
carrying out both announced and unannounced inspections to member states. While the first evaluation of the mechanism, covering the period 2015–19, identified general compliance among member states, it highlighted “allegations of fundamental rights violations” as a cause of concern requiring “close monitoring” (European Commission, 2020g, p. 8) – which illustrates the normalization of securitization in this field.

The 2014 Sea Borders Regulation – Converging Security and Humanitarianism

Governing Frontex’s operations at sea, including interceptions and SAR, the 2014 sea borders regulation (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014) became the subject of heated debate in the European Parliament’s LIBE committee hearings following the 2020 pushback allegations against Frontex in the Aegean Sea (Waters et al., 2020). The regulation stipulates the courses of action Frontex can take in detecting and intercepting migrant vessels suspected of trying to enter Europe ‘irregularly’ in member states’ territorial waters, contiguous zone, and on the high seas. Securitization is explicit in the regulation, which describes the role of border control to be punitive and deterring:

The purpose of border surveillance is to prevent unauthorised border crossings, to counter cross-border criminality and to apprehend or take other measures against those persons who have crossed the border in an irregular manner. Border surveillance should be effective in preventing and discouraging persons from circumventing the checks at border crossing points. To this end, border surveillance is not limited to the detection of attempts at unauthorised border crossings but equally extends to steps such as intercepting vessels suspected of trying to gain entry to the Union without submitting to border checks. (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, p. 93, emphases added)

Pre-emptive border control is therefore framed as leading to increased security, with the regulation leaving it to the discretion of individual ship captains to determine whether a vessel is ‘suspicious’ or not. At the same time, it sets out that relevant international and EU law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, must be respected during sea operations, especially during cooperation with third countries (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, pp. 94–96, 99–100). Just like in the Schengen Borders Code, we here see a mixing of securitarian and humanitarian logics, which indicates a high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field, with
the various legislations drawing both on each other and similar discourses. Humanitarian concerns are evident in the regulation’s emphasis on the obligation under the law of the seas to respond to boats in distress, disembarkation in the nearest place of safety, and member states’ duty to not prosecute captains or crew for conducting rescue. Article 4.3 stipulates that:

During a sea operation, before the intercepted or rescued persons are… handed over to the authorities of a third country and taking into account the assessment of the general situation in that third country… the participating units shall… use all means to identify the intercepted or rescued persons, assess their personal circumstances, inform them of their destination… and give them an opportunity to express any reasons for believing that disembarkation in the proposed place would be in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, p. 99, emphases added)

Security concerns come first, however, with the regulation providing that during interceptions in territorial waters, Frontex participating vessels may “where there are reasonable grounds” to suspect that a boat smuggles or carries people intending to circumvent border checks: (a) seize the vessel and apprehend the persons on board, (b) order “the vessel to alter its course outside of or towards a destination other than the territorial sea or the contiguous zone, including escorting the vessel… nearby until it is confirmed that the vessel is keeping to that given course”, or (c) direct “the vessel or persons on board to the coastal Member State in accordance with the operational plan” (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, pp. 100–101, emphases added). While the first option criminalizes migration, the second sets the stage for pushbacks, leaving only the last option a non-securitized response to irregularized migration. The same guidelines apply to interceptions on the high seas, except for the qualification that the vessel must be suspected of smuggling migrants rather than merely transporting them.

The regulation thus draws on a securitized humanitarian discourse (see Jensen, 2016, for discourse co-optation), containing a detailed list of instructions for how to identify and respond to boats in distress, involving multiple phases depending on the “likelihood” of it being a distress case (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014). For SAR outside of a member state’s SAR region, article 9 provides that if the third country responsible for that SAR region does not respond to the information provided by the Frontex vessel, it “shall contact the Rescue Coordination Centre of the host Member State unless that participating unit considers another internationally recognized Rescue Coordination Centre is better able to assume
coordination of the search and rescue situation” (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, p. 105, emphasis added). This means that distress cases in a third country’s SAR region are not to be left to that third country if it fails to act. Further, article 10(a) states that interceptions in the territorial sea or contiguous zone of a member state shall lead to disembarkation in that member state, whereas on the high seas article 10(b) provides that “disembarkation may take place in the third country from which the vessel is assumed to have departed. If that is not possible, disembarkation shall take place in the host Member State” (Regulation (EU) No 656/2014, p. 105, emphasis added).

The provision “may” is important, as this article does not require Frontex to disembark (or pushback) refugees and migrants intercepted on the high seas at their point of departure, although it leaves the option open for that. The qualification “assumed”, however, removes the burden of proof on Frontex vessels to identify where the vessel departed from and opens for discretion. In SAR cases, it is a joint responsibility between the host member state, participating member state, and the responsible Rescue Coordination Centre to identify a place of safety (article 10(c)), although if this takes too long the refugees and migrants should be disembarked in the host member state. Securitization thus shifts between being banal and explicit in this regulation, concealed by its humanitarian framing (cf. Fairclough’s, 2015, re-contextualization of discourse).

The Rise of Frontex – The Coalescence of Security, Crisis, and Humanitarianism

The border ritual reproduces the meaning and order of the state system… [it] is a secular and modern sort of divine sanctity with its own rite of sacrifice. (Khosravi, 2007, p. 330)

This section sketches Frontex’s growth from its modest beginnings in 2004 with a budget of €2,1 million and 43 staff to a fully-fledged operational agency with a budget of €1,1 billion, 2500 staff (Campesi, 2022), and a soon to be standing corps of 10,000 border guards comprising the EU’s first uniformed service. It does so by tracing the main developments in Frontex’s regulations, focusing on the convergence of securitarian, crisis, and humanitarian logics (see methods chapter for discourse coalescence).
Frontex’s 2004 Regulation: The Inception of a European Border and Coast Guard Agency

Security concerns were present from Frontex’s inception, with the agency being conceived in a political context marked by Western European member states’ fears that the EU’s eastward expansion would weaken controls at the external border, which were exacerbated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Campesi, 2022, pp. 98–99; Follis, 2018). Member states were reluctant towards creating a supranational border police, however, with Frontex being preceded by a weaker External Borders Practitioners’ Common Unit established in 2002 to manage the operational co-operation at the external borders and carry out risk analysis (European Commission, 2002). The unit was established under the Council’s JHA configuration in the form of a SCIFA+ working group, consisting of the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum (SCIFA) and national heads of border control (Council, 2002; Ekelund, 2014; Léonard, 2009). The Common Unit proved unequipped for its strategic and operational tasks because of its status as a Council working group, however, “raising therefore the need of alternative institutional solutions”, with the Commission arguing that a “much more operational body should perform the daily operational management of these activities” (European Commission, 2003, p. 7, emphasis added).

In its place, the Commission suggested the creation of a “new permanent Community structure”, which was welcomed by the Council and European Council (Ekelund, 2014, p. 106, emphasis added). Frontex was thus created with the Commission’s proposal a few months later, which was entitled “Establishing a European Agency for the Management of the Operational Co-operation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union” (Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004). Established in 2004 and operational from 2005, Frontex was a stronger alternative to the Common Unit but not as powerful as the debated “European Border Police” (Léonard, 2009; Neal, 2009), with a Management Board largely controlled by the member states (article 21). Security concerns were latent in Frontex’s tasks, which included: coordinating operational cooperation between member states in managing the external borders; assisting with training of border guards and establishing common training standards; conducting risk analyses; following R&D on surveillance of external borders; providing technical and operational assistance to member states in need; and supporting in organizing joint return operations (article 2).
Frontex’s 2007 Regulation: Launching Crisis Response

The securitized assumptions informing Frontex’s activities become more explicit when paired with crisis response following the 2006 “Canary Islands boat crisis”, which saw increased arrivals of refugees and migrants from West Africa (Ekelund, 2014; Lavenex, 2014; Neal, 2009). Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 introduced Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) that can be deployed to a member state “faced with a situation of urgent and exceptional pressure… at the external borders of large numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter… illegally” (article 8a, emphases added). The regulation maintains that “the current possibilities for providing efficient practical assistance with regard to checking persons at the external borders and the surveillance of the external borders at European level are not considered sufficient” during such situations, therefore providing member states the ability to request technical and operational assistance from Frontex in the form of temporary RABIT deployments (Regulation (EC) No 863/2007, p. 30). The 2007 regulation thus illustrates Frontex’s institutionalization of crisis logics, which facilitates both the securitization of migration and its subsequent normalization in this field.45

Frontex’s 2011 Regulation: Introducing Humanitarian Border Control

Following criticism from civil society actors that Frontex did not sufficiently respect fundamental rights, Regulation (EU) No 1168/2011 introduced a Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) and a Consultative Forum (CF) to advise Frontex on fundamental rights in its operations (article 26a; Campesi, 2022; Follis, 2018). The FRO is to report regularly to the Management Board and the CF, while the CF should publish an annual report of its activities and be “consulted on the further development and implementation of the Fundamental Rights Strategy, Code of Conduct and common core curricula” (Regulation (EU) No 1168/2011, p. 17). The Management Board decides on the composition of the CF, although the regulation stipulates that the EUAA, FRA, UNHCR, and “other relevant organisations” are to be invited (Regulation (EU) No 1168/2011). In order to carry out their work, the FRO and the CF “shall have access to all information concerning respect for fundamental rights, in relation to all activities

45 Only three years later this crisis mechanism was invoked for the first time, with deployments to the Evros region at the request of the Greek government. Frontex remains active there today with Operation Poseidon land, despite repeated calls by civil society actors and leftist political groups in the European Parliament to withdraw its operations due to alleged systematic fundamental rights violations (European Parliament, 2022; see also Parusel, 2022).
of the Agency” (Regulation (EU) No 1168/2011, p. 17, emphases added). These are internal monitoring mechanisms, however, which means that they are not fully independent of Frontex. The regulation did not introduce the external monitoring mechanisms that were suggested by the European Parliament (Campesi, 2022, pp. 105–106), leaving the CF a weak advisory body with no enforcement mechanism (interview 11/3/2020).

Campesi (2022, pp. 104–105, emphasis added) explains the “surprising absence of any references to... fundamental rights” in Frontex’s founding regulation as due to Frontex’s lack of executive powers, placing responsibility for violations on the host member state instead. Léonard (2009, p. 385) emphasizes the European Parliament’s lack of influence in the setting up of Frontex as a reason for why fundamental rights were initially given such low priority in its activities, with the Parliament being the “traditional human rights champion” in the EU institutional triangle. In the 2011 regulation, we thus see the introduction of humanitarian logics to Frontex’s mandate, that are used to make its operations more palatable to the public. This follows the trajectory of other EU regulations discussed in this chapter, which illustrates the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field. As Campesi (2022, p. 114, emphases added) points out:

Frontex is clearly placed alongside other JHA agencies as a node in the complex institutional archipelago called on to protect the AFSJ from threats... [which] reinforces the contradiction... between the largely securitarian mandate attributed to the EU border agency and the humanitarian rhetoric that often surrounds its action.

This humanitarianization of border control deepens in the 2016 regulation, which was part of the EU’s response to the 2015 ‘crisis’ (Campesi, 2022; interview 15/7/21; Perkowski et al., 2023).

46 This is not always the case, however, as the interviews with CF members revealed (interviews 5/2/2020, 10/3/2020, 11/3/2020).
Frontex’s 2016 Regulation: Institutionalizing Humanitarian Border Control

Proposed by the Commission following the 2015 ‘crisis’, the 2016 regulation draws on securitarian, crisis, and humanitarian discourses in framing it as necessary to prevent the further loss of life in the Mediterranean while at the same time protecting Schengen (see Campesi, 2022). The regulation created a strengthened European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA), gave Frontex an explicit SAR mandate, and introduced an individual Complaints Mechanism for refugees and migrants affected by its operations (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624). Securitization is evident despite the regulation drawing on a humanitarian discourse, with the purpose of the revamped agency being:

Addressing migratory challenges and potential future threats at… borders, thereby contributing to addressing serious crime with a cross-border dimension, to ensure a high level of internal security within the Union in full respect for fundamental rights, while safeguarding the free movement of persons within it. (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, pp. 2, 10, emphases added)

An important development is the introduction of so-called “vulnerability assessments”, which give Frontex monitoring responsibilities of member states, evaluating their “capacity and readiness… to face challenges at their external borders” (article 13, point 4). This includes the establishment of a Vulnerability Assessment Unit and requirement of member states to “take measures to address any deficiencies identified in that assessment” (paragraph 21). Framed as both a “quality control mechanism” and a “crisis preparedness measure” by the Frontex officials (interviews 23/6/21, 20/7/21), vulnerability assessments illustrate the institutionalization of banal securitization, strengthening Frontex’s power vis-à-vis member states and expanding the scope of its border knowledge – thus reinforcing Frontex’s role as an important knowledge producer in this field (see also Fjørtoft, 2022).

A more explicit securitization, fueled by a crisis logic, is the 2016 regulation’s granting of a right to intervene for Frontex in cases where a member state consistently fails to control its section of the external border, putting the wider Schengen area at “risk” (article 19). Similarly, to prevent situations like in 2015 from happening again, a rapid reaction pool of 1500 border and coast guards is to be ready for deployment at the external borders in “the context of a situation requiring urgent action” (paragraph 29, emphasis added). The regulation also reinforces the externalization of border controls, opening for Frontex to send
liaison officers to third countries and launch joint operations with neighboring third countries on their territory (articles 54–55). Security concerns inform both where these officers should be deployed and their tasks, which is to “those third countries which, on the basis of risk analysis, constitute a country of origin or transit regarding illegal immigration”, working with them to “fight against illegal immigration and the return of returnees” (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, p. 45, emphasis added).

Drawing on a humanitarian discourse, the regulation emphasizes that these activities should be carried out in compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and international human rights law (article 54). Whereas the 2011 regulation introduced humanitarian logics, the 2016 regulation institutionalizes them, which is evidenced by the multiple articles relating to fundamental rights. This includes Frontex’s new SAR mandate, which requires it to “provide technical and operational assistance in the support of search and rescue operations for persons in distress at sea” and “assist Member States in conducting search and rescue operations in order to protect and save lives whenever and wherever so required” (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, pp. 2, 7, emphasis added). Moreover, the regulation affords the Executive Director, after consulting the FRO, the ability to suspend or terminate any activities that are in violation of “fundamental rights or international protection obligations that are of a serious nature or are likely to persist” (Regulation (EU) 2016/1624, p. 28).

Further fundamental rights protections include: article 34, which lays out the relevant international and EU law Frontex should abide by; article 35, which encourages the further development of a code of conduct for border control and return operations in cooperation with the CF; article 36, which calls for the development of a common core curricula for border guards in consultation with the CF and the FRO; and article 70, which gives the CF the power to carry out “on-the-spot visits to joint operations or rapid border interventions… and to hotspot areas, return operations and return interventions” (point 5). The regulation also mentions the proper resourcing and staffing of the FRO’s office, along with the FRO’s administration of the Complaints Mechanism in order to “safeguard the respect for fundamental rights in all activities of the Agency”.

47 The first such operation was with Albania in 2019 (Frontex, 2019a).

48 This so-called “nuclear option” has only been used once, despite the CF calling for the suspension of Frontex’s activities in Hungary for years (interviews 5/2/2020, 11/3/2020). Frontex only suspended its operations in January 2021 after the ECJ ruled that Hungary breaches EU asylum law with its practice of transit zones and pushbacks to Serbia (Barigazzi 2021a), although continuing its return activities there.
The FRO should only review the admissibility of complaints, register them, and forward them to the Executive Director and member states concerned, however, who will decide on the actions taken (point 4).  

Frontex’s 2019 Regulation: A Fully-Fledged Operational and Epistemic Actor

Frontex’s latest regulation sees a reduced intensity of securitization, with its character also shifting from explicit to more banal. As Perkowski et al. (2020, p. 122, emphasis added) observe:

While Frontex’s transformation… in 2016 took place at record speed against the backdrop of an acute crisis, its 2018 reform was justified with the need to prepare for and avert the constantly looming threat of a repetition of events unfolding in 2015 and 2016.

The 2019 regulation (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896) consolidates Frontex’s securitized humanitarian crisis logic and strengthens its role as both an operational and epistemic actor. Its capacities are expanded to include: a standing corps of 10,000 border guards with executive powers (article 54); the ability to conduct operations in non-neighboring countries (articles 73–74); a larger role in managing regular travelers through the hosting of the ETIAS Central Unit (section 10); setting up of antenna offices in both EU and non-EU countries to assist with border control and returns (article 60); the incorporation of Eurosur under Frontex; and the creation of 40 fundamental rights monitors to oversee its operations (article 110). The creation of a standing corps is a landmark in the supranationalization of EU external border control, allowing Frontex to recruit its own border guards instead of relying on secondments from member states. The co-legislators justify the regulation by drawing on a securitized crisis discourse:

The Union framework in the areas of external border control, return, combating cross-border crime, and asylum still needs to be further improved. To that end… the European Border and Coast Guard should be reformed by giving the agency a stronger mandate… by providing it with the necessary capabilities in the form of a… standing corps… having a capacity of 10 000 operational staff… with

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49 This remedial mechanism comes more than a decade after the creation of Frontex and three years after the European Ombudsman (2013) recommended its establishment, which Frontex initially rejected since it considered the responsibility for fundamental rights violations to lay with the member state concerned.
executive powers… to effectively support Member States on the ground in their efforts to protect the external borders… Such a capacity… [is] required to effectively address existing and future operational needs… in the Union and third countries, including a rapid reaction capacity to face future crises. (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 2, emphases added)

Frontex’s role as a knowledge producer is also strengthened in the 2019 regulation, with the first three tasks of the agency concerning risk analysis, data on returns, and vulnerability assessments (article 10). The regulation emphasizes that vulnerability assessments and the Schengen evaluation mechanism complement each other in “ensuring constant preparedness… to respond to any challenges at the external borders”, establishing “an improved situational picture of the functioning of the Schengen area” (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 6, emphasis added; article 33). Securitization is here explicit, with the regulation stipulating that Frontex should attribute impact levels (low, medium, high, critical) to member states’ sections of the external border, based on its risk analyses and vulnerability assessments, to evaluate the impact of “illegal” immigration and cross-border crime and prescribe the measures needed (articles 34–35).

The regulation further calls on the Commission to develop a multiannual strategic policy for Integrated Border Management (IBM) based on Frontex’s risk analyses, setting out the priorities and guidelines in this field for the next five years (article 8). Risk analysis and information exchange are also prioritized activities in cooperation with third countries, being hailed as “key factors for achieving the objectives of European integrated border management” (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 13; articles 71–74). This banal securitization is complemented by calls for enhanced cooperation with Europol in tackling migrant smuggling and trafficking, although the regulation notes that “Member States are able to decide not to impose sanctions where the aim of the behavior is to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants” (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 6, emphasis added). The meshing of a securitarian and humanitarian discourse is also evident in the description of Eurosur, which according to the regulation will:

Considerably improve the operational and technical ability of the Agency and the Member States to detect such small vessels and to improve the reaction capability of the Member States, thereby contributing to reducing the loss of lives of migrants. (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 5, emphases added)
Security concerns take precedence, however, with the regulation emphasizing that Eurosur should “provide an exhaustive situational picture not only at the external borders but also within the Schengen area and in the pre-frontier area” for the purposes of risk analysis and monitoring of “unauthorised secondary movements” (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 5, emphasis added; sections 3–4). Fundamental rights concerns only come towards the end of the regulation, with article 80 obligating Frontex to ensure that:

No person… be *forced* to disembark in, forced to enter, or conducted to a country, or be otherwise handed over or returned to the authorities of a country where there is… a *serious risk* that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty, torture, persecution, or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, or where his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of his or her race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or from where there is a risk of expulsion, removal, extradition or return to another country in contravention of the principle of non-refoulement. (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, p. 73, emphases added)

Frontex should also consider the special needs of vulnerable groups such as children, unaccompanied minors, women, persons with disabilities, and victims of trafficking; and the CF is now to have “*effective access in a timely... manner* to all information concerning the respect for fundamental rights” in Frontex’s activities (article 108, emphasis added). The tasks of the FRO are further expanded, with the establishment of a Deputy Fundamental Rights Officer. Nevertheless, fundamental rights concerns should not come at the expense of effective border control, with the FRO to advise Frontex “where he or she deems it necessary or where requested on any activity of the Agency *without delaying* those activities” (article 109 point 2(d), emphasis added).50

There is thus a discrepancy between Frontex’s humanitarian discourse and its security-oriented practices, with the European Ombudsman criticizing the lack of transparency and accessibility of the Complaints Mechanism (European Ombudsman, 2020); critique by the CF and the FRO for Frontex’s lack of follow-up of their recommendations (interviews 5/2/2020, 11/3/2020, 12/4/21); and the OLAF report in 2022 which probed the resignation of the Executive Director over

50 The expansion of the FRO’s office came after the CF had called for it for years, in order for the FRO to be able to effectively undertake her tasks (interview 11/3/2020). Frontex was also criticized by both the Commission and the European Parliament for failing to hire the 40 fundamental rights monitors by the deadline stipulated in the regulation (see the Frontex Scrutiny Group’s public hearings; DG Home, 2020).
Frontex’s complicity in pushbacks in the Aegean Sea (Barigazzi & Lynch, 2022; Christides & Lüdke, 2022). As Follis (2018, p. 219, emphasis added) points out, it seems that “no matter how many fundamental rights clauses are incorporated in Frontex rules, border management cannot escape its primary task of selective exclusion of those who are deemed ‘undesirable’”. The presentation of Frontex’s tasks as “a set of neutral, self-evidently desirable measures in the interest of efficiency… [and] security” (Follis, 2018, p. 217, emphases added) thus masks the political and exclusionary nature of border control. This reflects Campesi’s (2022, p. 114, emphases added) summary of Frontex’s evolution as:

A hybrid agency, being caught by two apparently insoluble antinomies: between the desire to reinforce supranationalism in border governance and its intergovernmental institutional set-up, on the one side; and the antinomy between its actual role as a security agency and the humanitarian values enshrined by its legal framework, on the other side.

Spurred by the formal powers granted by its legal basis, Frontex has hence emerged as an influential epistemic actor in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control, determining what information is relevant about the situation at the borders and gets disseminated to EUropean policymakers. This discursive power should not be underestimated, since “EU security agencies are not characterized so much for their prerogative to use coercive powers, but rather for their ability to define threats and offer solutions for their management” (Campesi, 2022, p. 139, emphasis added). This is even more important due to the legitimizing effects of technical expertise (Fjørtoft, 2022), which in tacit ways influences and routinizes certain responses to irregularized migration. As Bigo (2002, p. 87) points out, “the critical discourses concerning securitarian discourses are very well known to security professionals and politicians. Those people are seldom if ever fooled by their own arguments. They use them to bring electoral benefits” and strengthen their own position. The role of Frontex’s technocratic power to decide what should be considered a risk, crisis, or humanitarian in this field is what we turn to now.
5) THE CONSTRUCTION OF RISK, CRISIS, AND HUMANITARIANISM IN FRONTEX’S BORDER KNOWLEDGE

It is precisely the possibility of... constructing knowledge from huge datasets that will allow border agencies to discriminate between ‘bona fide’ and ‘risky’ travellers, thus practicing the more selective and knowledge-based border control policy advocated by Frontex. (Campesi, 2022, p. 183, emphases added)

This chapter seeks to answer the first research question, examining how Frontex’s border knowledge securitizes migration in both banal and explicit ways by constructing and exaggerating the ostensible risks and crises posed by refugees and migrants. By drawing on these discursive practices, Frontex not only normalizes securitization, but is able to justify more border controls in response to irregularized migration and strengthen its own role in predicting and preventing future risks and crises at the external(ized) border. The chapter illustrates how Frontex, through the production of ostensibly technical and apolitical risk analysis reports, has created a particular type of border knowledge that distorts as much as it informs about the situation at the borders and serves as a constraining frame of reference for the policy responses that become conceivable in this field. The first section discusses the role of Frontex’s risk analyses in EUropean external(ized) border control, while the second section analyzes the themes through which Frontex securitizes migration.
The Role of Frontex’s Risk Analyses

The narrative of risk is a narrative of irony. This narrative deals with the involuntary satire, the optimistic futility, with which the highly developed institutions of modern society – science, state, business and military – attempt to anticipate what cannot be anticipated. (Beck, 2006, p. 329, emphasis added)

Risk analysis is one of the ways in which security professionals try to legitimize their own role in ‘managing’ migration (Bigo, 2002, p. 73; Fjørtoft, 2022; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2018). It should thus not be understood as a neutral or remote activity but key to Frontex’s authority and survival in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control, which gives it an incentive to exaggerate the ‘dangers’ identified in its reports. Risk analysis has been one of Frontex’s main tasks since the beginning (see article 2.1, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004) and is key to its work, being “the starting point for all Frontex activities, from high level strategic decision-making to planning and implementation of operational activities” (Frontex, 2021h, emphasis added). Frontex’s risk analyses thus occupy a central role in this field, being targeted at the EU institutions and bodies, policymakers, national border authorities, and law enforcement (email correspondence Frontex, 20/4/23). Through its risk analyses, Frontex portrays an image of total control, asserting that:

Frontex knows what’s going on at Europe’s borders: where the threats are, how to react, and where they’re likely to emerge next. Our 24/7 monitoring of the situation on the border and beyond, combined with comprehensive risk analysis, gives us a Europe-wide view of border control and migration management. Frontex helps spot potential weak points and strengthen Europe’s resilience... risk analysis guides all Frontex activities, helping us decide where our human and technical resources should be deployed. (Frontex, 2021c, emphases added)

Frontex’s risk analysis products range from situation-specific weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, and semi-annual reports to the general annual risk analysis reports. The data feeding into the reports is gathered from Frontex’s partners in regionally established Risk Analysis Networks (FRAN), which are comprised of EUropean member states, Western Balkan countries, Eastern Partnership countries (EaP), Turkey, and the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC). Since 2008, data has been systematically gathered from member states in the form of analytical and incident reports, questionnaires, and statistics on selected
“indicators of irregular migration”, which includes: detections of “illegal border crossings”, “illegal stay”, facilitators, forged documents, refusals of entry, asylum applications,51 returns, and passenger flow (Frontex, 2017, p. 9). This is complemented with data gathered from joint operations, Eurosur, Europol, the EUAA, debriefing interviews with refugees and migrants, and open sources such as reports from government agencies, civil society organizations, and news media (Frontex, 2021i, p. 11). Data gathering is thus an integral part of Frontex’s risk analyses. As Bigo et al. (2016, p. 54, emphases added) point out:

Treatment (organization, prioritization, classification and ultimately interpretation and anticipation of the threat environment) of data, and consequently the production of security knowledge, is indeed conditioned upon the access to the relevant data.

Risk analysis serves several functions for Frontex’s activities, being categorized into three different types of analysis with corresponding sectors responsible for them under the Risk Analysis Unit: 1) strategic analysis, 2) operational analysis, and 3) third country analysis. The first is oriented towards informing high-level strategic decision-makers of overarching risks, the second focuses on risks in day-to-day operations, and the third is “committed to long-term cooperation with external partners in regions where threats and challenges for the EU external border originate and which they pass through” – especially the Western Balkans, Turkey, EaP countries, and Africa (Frontex, 2021j, emphasis added). There is little information on Frontex’s website about “strategic analysis”, except that it should “enable informed decision-making on priorities and appropriate risk mitigation measures… [C]reating a wider picture of the main trends in irregular migration… in the medium and long term” (Frontex, 2021j, para. 2). The annual risk analysis reports belong to this category of products.

Operational analysis, on the other hand, has a shorter-term focus, providing daily updates from the ongoing operations on smugglers’ ‘modus operandi’, networks, and routes. This analysis also takes place before the start of operations, mapping the main migratory trends in order to determine where to launch operations. This information is later detailed in a “tactical focused assessment” which forms part of the operational plan, laying out the type and number of assets required (Frontex, 2021g, para. 2). Despite the more technical nature of

51 Frontex stopped gathering data on this in 2019 since it led to double counting with the EUAA, now relying on theirs and Eurostat data instead.
operational analysis, it feeds into the overarching strategic analysis and is shared with the European Commission and national and international law enforcement bodies (Frontex, 2021g). Third country analysis distinguishes itself from the other two in that it focuses on trends in third countries that could potentially have consequences for migration to Europe, including the political situation, economic downturns, and natural disasters. This data is gathered from open sources and Frontex’s risk analysis networks with neighboring regions, and is described as mutually beneficial:

[The Risk Analysis Unit] remains committed to long-term cooperation with external partners in regions neighbouring the EU (Western Balkans, Turkey, Eastern Partnership, and Africa), striving to provide up-to-date situational awareness and enhanced analytical capabilities for the benefit of all partners’ border management authorities. (Frontex, 2021k)

Third country analysis is thus more predictive than strategic and operational analysis, with the sector hosting a “pre-warning mechanism”, which aims “to increase preparedness to face future challenges related to irregular migration and cross-border crime… identifying and assessing possible threats, producing… forecasting analytics plus early warnings to support both operational and strategic planning” (Frontex, 2021k, para. 5, emphasis added). This type of analysis has both a wider geographical and temporal frame, focusing not only on present risks at the external(ized) border but future risks that might materialize further away. Except for the “outlook” chapters of the annual risk analysis reports, however, the content is largely descriptive statistics of Frontex’s “indicators of irregular migration”, comparing trends over time and clustering border crossings into a handful of main routes in the Mediterranean and the Balkans (see Figure 7). Maps and the names of these routes feature frequently in Frontex’s publications and have made their way into media and the political sphere – illustrating Frontex’s influential position as a producer of border knowledge in this field. The reports range from 30–80 pages in length and cover the trends from the past year.

52 However, Tazzioli (2018) argues that Frontex’s situational awareness serves as an “archive” of past events rather than a real-time monitoring tool due to the time gap between data collection, uploading, and visualization.
To be able to analyze risks across member states, however, a common way to understand them was needed. Frontex’s founding regulation thus tasked the agency with developing a “common integrated risk analysis model” (CIRAM) (article 4), which is described as “a conceptual framework to assist Frontex and Member States in the preparation of risk analyses”, promoting “a common understanding of risk analysis while simultaneously… contribut[ing] to greater coherence in the management of the external borders” (Frontex, 2021b, para. 1, emphases added). The CIRAM is framed as an objective, managerial approach to the analysis of risk, which is defined as a function of threat, vulnerability (of borders), and impact (see Figure 8). Risk analysis is presented as a “key tool in ensuring the optimal allocation of resources within constraints of budget, staff and efficiency of equipment” and a “pragmatic way of structuring the information” according to the magnitude and likelihood of a “threat”, the capacity of member states to respond”, and the impacts of the “threat” (Frontex, 2021b, para. 4, emphases added). The risk analysis model should therefore be “of much use to decision-makers in setting priorities, in formulating counter-measures and in designating operational targets” (Frontex, 2021b, para. 3, emphases added) – impacting refugees and migrants’ autonomy of migration and lives.
The Frontex officials also stressed the importance of risk analysis in guiding operational decisions and keeping the “political level” (e.g., the Commission and the Council) up to date on developments in the field (interview 15/7/21). This illustrates these actors’ role as an audience, with Frontex’s risk analysis serving as an evidence base for EU-level decisions to allocate technical and operational assistance to member states’ border authorities identified as in need due to the ‘migratory situation’ (Campesi, 2022, p. 140). The influence of Frontex’s border knowledge should thus not be underestimated, since it affords border control an aura of ‘scientificity’ despite its “peculiar non-scientific character” (Paul, 2018, p. 231, emphasis added). As Horii (2016, p. 255, emphasis added) points out, “though Frontex does not exercise formal decision-making power, its risk analysis has appeared as a guide affecting the ways in which decisions are made for… internal as well as external borders”.

53 The ability of Frontex’s risk analyses to direct policies and practices on the ground makes it important an locus of analysis, especially considering its opacity, “weak scientific foundations”, the “grave methodological problems” of predicting border crossings, and the

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53 This de-coupling of risk analysis from decision-making in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control facilitates the dispersal of accountability and blame shifting between the EU, member states, and Frontex (Fink, 2018; Gkliati, 2018; Moreno-Lax, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2011; Rijpma, 2017).

As Bigo (2002, p. 76) points out, securitization “involves the imposition of a claim about security understood as a ‘truth’ of institutions and ‘independent experts’”. Thus, rather than being an objective form of knowledge, the following will demonstrate how Frontex’s securitized ontological and epistemological underpinnings steers its understanding of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism.

**Frontex’s Construction of Risk**

The securitization of migration is… a *mode of governmentality* by diverse institutions to play with the unease, or to *encourage it* if it does not yet exist, so as to affirm their role as providers of protection and security and to mask some of their failures. (Bigo, 2002, p. 65, emphases added)

How is migration securitized in Frontex’s border knowledge? The next three sections analyze how Frontex securitizes migration in both banal and explicit ways and the role of the construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism in this. The analysis covers the first and second dimensions of Fairclough’s (2015) three-dimensional model, examining the themes in the reports and the discursive practices that characterize them. The concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity will be used to examine how the different reports draw on each other and the same discourses in order to reproduce both the ‘risk’ and ‘crisis’ posed by refugees and migrants at the external(ized) border. The analysis focuses on sections of the reports that are relevant to irregularized migration, and proceeds chronologically in order to account for changes in the discourses over time.

A total of 11 themes were identified as securitizing in the annual risk analysis reports from 2009–21. Seven of these relate to the construction of risk, two to the construction of crisis, and two to the construction of humanitarianism. While there is considerable overlap between these, this categorization was made to facilitate systematic analysis of how Frontex draws on these elements in securitizing migration. The themes relating to risk include: a detached and de-humanizing discourse; mobility as inherently risky; constructing criminalizing categories; the irregular/regular binary; risk analysis as the panacea; the
migration-asylum-crime nexus; and the migration-terrorism nexus.54 The themes explicitly relating to crisis are: the (re)production and inflation of irregularity, risk, and crisis; and the construction and normalization of crises. The themes relating to humanitarianism concern: inverted humanitarian border control; and securitized humanitarian crisis discourse. As the following will demonstrate, these themes illustrate how Frontex discursively constructs migration as something risky, portrays the situation at Europe’s borders as plagued by a continuous crisis, and presents more border control as the solution to suffering and deaths at the borders. What also becomes evident through the analysis is the self-justificatory role of Frontex’s border knowledge (Campesi, 2014; Horii, 2016), with the reports framing risk analysis as crucial in preventing unwanted migration and as such strengthening the role of Frontex’s expert knowledge in this field.

A Detached and De-Humanizing Discourse

The first theme is present in all the reports, and is characterized by a sanitized discourse which minimizes the humanness of refugees and migrants, their protection needs, and suffering at the external(ized) border. Securitization is banal due to its implicit form in this theme. The theme is comprised of two sub-themes: 1) obscuring of humans by explaining migration as a result of structural factors, and conversely 2) the anthropomorphizing of borders, which become the object of protection.55 The discursive practices of obscuring and inversion are the most pronounced ones in this theme, where the external(ized) border is portrayed as in need of protection from refugees and migrants rather than the other way around – making increased border controls a commonsensical response (cf. Fairclough, 2015) to irregularized migration.

‘Push and Pull’ Factors – Obscuring Humans

The first sub-theme is characterized by the discursive practice of obscuring and the simplified push-pull model, which explains migratory movement as responding to external factors (see Lee, 1966). This theme is present already in the 2010 report, which describes refugees and migrants as being pushed and

54 The first clustering of themes resonates with Vollmer’s (2011, p. 338) findings of “threat and criminalization” and “numbers games” as “two discursive elements... in the discourse of irregular migration policy making in the EU”.

55 As Bigo (2002, p. 73, emphases added) points out, security professionals “refuse the heterogeneity of life and always try to reduce it to homogeneity and hierarchy between different categories”.
pulled according to macroeconomic forces. This can be seen in the executive summary, which notes a 33% decrease in “illegal” migration to Europe in 2009 compared to 2008, which it argues is the result of lack of job opportunities after the financial crisis and a “strong deterrent effect of more effective border controls” between West Africa and the Canary Islands and Libya and Lampedusa (Frontex 2010, pp. 3, 12). Here employment is considered a weakened ‘pull factor’ and externalization a successful deterrence, obscuring refugees and migrants’ multifaceted reasons for deciding whether to migrate or not. This reductionist model lies at the basis of the 2011 report’s explanations of migration as well, which describes the economic crisis and social unrest in Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco following the Arab Spring as a ‘push factor’, increasing “the risk of opportunity-driven irregular migration” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 47, emphasis added) to Europe.

The 2011 report suggests the rise in global food prices to be another ‘push factor’, and the civil war in Libya is described as of “increasing concern”, with the risk that the country’s large migrant workforce will “illegally migrate” to Europe (Frontex, 2011a, p. 48). The conflict in Afghanistan is also mentioned, with the report concerned with population growth, rising youth unemployment, and the deteriorating security situation in the country; along with potential displacement due to flooding and terrorist threats in Pakistan (Frontex, 2011a). A similar limiting analytical framework informs the 2012 report, which predicts the Central Mediterranean route to be subject to “large flows” due to continued political instability and unemployment, described as “pushing people abroad” (Frontex, 2012, p. 5, emphasis added). The report provides a list of future scenarios to worry about, including that the Greek-Turkish border is likely to experience “large and sustained numbers of illegal border-crossing” due to Turkey’s geographical proximity to so-called “source countries for migrants hoping to illegally cross the border to the EU” (Frontex, 2012, p. 39, emphasis added). More explicitly, the 2014 report describes refugees and migrants as “risks that arise at the external borders themselves and… in third countries” (Frontex, 2014, p. 11, emphasis added), being represented in the statistical annex as numbers of “illegal border-crossings” rather than people crossing – thus both dehumanizing and securitizing them.

Frontex’s concern with developments in faraway regions continues in the 2016 report, which highlights the increasing unwillingness of Pakistan and Iran to host the millions of displaced Afghans, which could serve as a ‘push factor’ for them to come to Europe; and warns that low oil prices might entice the 3.5 million Pakistani labor migrants in the Gulf region to consider Europe as a more
attractive destination (Frontex, 2016, p. 40). Illustrating the reports’ de-centering of humans, it describes “migration flows” from the Horn of Africa as mostly consisting of young men who are “driven by regional security issues, slow economic development, and lack of long-term livelihood options” (Frontex, 2016, p. 41, emphasis added), depriving them of agency. The report asserts that since these movements are often financed by diaspora members, this creates a downward spiral where “the more migrants are able to settle in Europe, the more people are likely to attempt the dangerous journey” (Frontex, 2016, p. 41, emphases added). Here refugees and migrants are portrayed as locked in a self-perpetuating cycle in which they are unable to escape, both to their own detriment and Europe’s. This deterministic outlook precludes refugees and migrants’ rationality, who (un)knowingly risk their lives no matter what, while not mentioning the limited alternatives available for them to reach Europe in safe and legal ways (European Parliament, 2018a; Moreno-Lax, 2017).

This detached discourse is evident in the 2021 report’s “third country overview” section as well, which ascertains that “migratory pressure” on the Eastern and Central Mediterranean routes are “a function of developments in the main origin, host and transit countries” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 20, emphasis added), inferring an almost causal effect. The report declares increased poverty following the Covid19 pandemic and population growth in Africa as a “clear warning” of increased irregularized migration to Europe; with the change of the “situational overview” chapter to “migratory flow” (Frontex, 2021i, pp. 21, 12–13) invoking connotations to the physical process of flowing water rather than active decisions being made, further minimizing the human element of mobility.56 Referring to refugees and migrants’ mobility as “migratory pressure” and a “function” of external factors de-humanizes them and enables their subsequent securitization (see the Copenhagen School’s “facilitating conditions”), since they are seen as irrational ‘risky subjects’ rather than people deserving of protection, being treated as indistinguishable parts of aggregated ‘flows’. This sub-theme has thus illustrated how Frontex’s border knowledge systematically obscures humans through its use of a dispassionate terminology and syntax, despite human mobility being at the center of the reports. Securitization takes on a banal form in this theme, which is moderate in degree.

As Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2014, p. 126, emphases added) point out, Frontex “veil[s] the specificities, motivations, experiences, wants and desires of

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56 Wodak (2020) notes that this use of natural metaphors is a linguistic strategy often used by populist parties.
migrants” by reducing them to “quantifiable pieces of data”.57 For Frontex officials, “individuals… are less physical bodies than ‘data doubles’, ‘dissociated persons’ to be disassembled and reassembled by their statistics” (Bigo, 2014, p. 211, emphasis added).

**Anthropomorphized Borders as the Object of Protection**

Whereas refugees and migrants are de-humanized in Frontex’s border knowledge, borders are conversely anthropomorphized, described as being ‘vulnerable’ to ‘migratory pressure’ (see also Andersson, 2016). This discursive practice of inversion is evident in the 2012 report’s section on “modus operandi”, which details the different ways refugees and migrants try to circumvent border checks, including: false statements of nationality to avoid deportation; applying for asylum as a last resort when apprehended; traveling with forged documents to smaller and “less-equipped” EUropean airports; and using less sophisticated documents such as ID cards, which are easier to forge (Frontex, 2012, p. 24). The report explicitly securitizes migration by calling for more cooperation on EU-level to prevent document fraud, which it describes as “seriously undermin[ing]… national social systems and the ability of any state to effectively manage and protect its legitimate communities” (Frontex, 2012, pp. 27, 40, emphases added).58 Frontex’s preoccupation with “modus operandi” illustrates how entrenched securitization is in its border knowledge, where the focus is on the risks posed by the people attempting to cross the borders rather than the risks they are exposed to while doing so.

Similarly, the 2012 report emphasizes the risk of border control authorities being “faced with large flows of people in search of international protection”, with this used as a “modus operandi to illegally enter the EU”, overloading border control authorities and “diverting resources that would otherwise be used to carry out border controls” (Frontex, 2012, p. 41, emphases added). Securitization is evident here, with the report considering these people to be ‘irregular migrants’ rather than asylum-seekers, using asylum only as a mean to get to EUrope. The 2013 report explicitly anthropomorphizes borders, warning that “the internet and

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57 Frontex’s risk analyses are also arbitrary in scope as potentially any event in a third country could serve as a ‘push factor’, with the reports not providing an explanation for the selection of cases or why people would necessarily migrate to EUrope – especially considering that the majority of (refugee) migration takes place to neighboring countries in the Global South (UNHCR, 2021). See Aradau and van Munster (2011) for uncertainty as a form of governing.

58 See also Buzan et al.’s (1998) “societal security”; or Wodak, 2020, for protection of the homeland as a nationalist ideology.
social networking sites will contribute to the rapid exploitation of vulnerabilities along the external border” (Frontex, 2013, p. 62, emphasis added), referring to vulnerabilities of border sections rather than refugees and migrants.

By drawing on the discursive practice of inversion, the 2014 report stresses the “vulnerability” of land borders to “massive or emergency flows” (Frontex, 2014, p. 24), focusing on the protection of the border itself rather than refugees and migrants. The report’s emphasis on the border is also evident in the re-organized table of contents. Whereas the earlier reports were structured thematically with sections on “passenger flow”, “irregular migration”, and “other illegal activities”, these are now re-grouped into sections relating to where someone is in relation to the border: “before the border”, “at the border”, or “after the border” (Frontex, 2014, p. 3) – making the ‘border’ the organizing principle of the report. This new structuring makes it clear that the border is the “referent object of security” (Buzan et al., 1998) rather than the people crossing it or being ‘protected’ by it (see also Andersson, 2016; cf. Billig’s, 1995, analysis of deixis). Elevating the inanimate object of the ‘border’ to be deserving of protection rather than the humans crossing it demonstrates the discursive practice of inversion, which allows Frontex to simultaneously de-humanize refugees and migrants while humanizing the border.

The anthropomorphization of borders accelerates following the 2015 ‘crisis’, with the 2015 report describing secondary movements as a “vulnerability for EU internal security” (Frontex, 2015, p. 20, emphasis added) rather than for refugees and migrants themselves, who live under the constant threat of Dublin return. Similarly, the 2016 report emphasizes persistent “vulnerabilities in detecting fraudulent documents” on intra-EU flights due to poor technical equipment (Frontex, 2016, p. 25, emphasis added), with the concern being document security than human security. Moreover, the 2020 report describes refugees and migrants moving through the Balkans as “migratory pressure… projected northward”, noting that “Slovenia felt much of the pressure emanating from the region” (Frontex, 2020, p. 24, emphases added). Whereas the state here becomes anthropoid, refugees and migrants are deprived of their human qualities, being depicted as physical forces impacting on the external(ized) border.

This sub-theme thus demonstrates how Frontex, through the discursive practice of inversion, frames the external(ized) border as in need of protection rather than refugees and migrants, being the referent object of purported migratory threats. The risk analysis reports not only obscure the humans it seeks to protect the borders from (refugees and migrants) but also the ones these borders are supposed to protect (EUropean citizens), which are rarely mentioned. Securitization is
Subtle but constant in this wider theme, being closer to the Paris School and Billig’s (1995) emphasis on the mundane rather than the spectacular (cf. Buzan et al., 1998). By resorting to a bureaucratic discourse, Frontex attempts to “disguise the political nature of risk analysis”, with risk analysis being:

Part of a broader tendency of governments involving expert agencies in political decision-making to portray policy issues as technocratic or managerial… and to thereby increase governmental legitimacy and scope for action. (Paul, 2017, p. 698, emphasis added)

We will return to Frontex and DG Home officials’ efforts to (de)politicize border control in order to legitimize it and distance themselves from its deadly effects in the last chapter.

**Mobility as Inherently Risky**

The second theme refers to Frontex’s framing of not only irregularized migration but mobility in general as inherently ‘risky’. This securitized assumption is embedded in all the reports, but is most visibly expressed as a suspicion towards visa liberalization (especially for Western Balkan countries) and favoring of visa policy as a pre-filtering mechanism instead (see Scheel, 2022, for the “state of suspicion” in the EU’s visa regime). Rather than emphasizing its mobility-enhancing function, the risk analysis reports portray visa policy as necessary to inhibit the mobility of undeserving and ‘risky’ subjects (see Bigo, 2014, p. 219, for how visa required nationals are transformed into “‘legitimate’ objects of suspicion”). Securitization is both moderate in form and degree in this theme, with the reports’ drawing on the discursive practices of construction, inflation, and obscuring.

**Suspicion towards Visa Liberalization**

The first sub-theme is evident already in the 2010 report, which links visa liberalization for EU accession states with a risk of increased “illegal” migration through the Western Balkans, warning that it will incentivize people from neighboring countries without visa facilitation to use forged Western Balkan travel documents to get to Europe (Frontex, 2010). Similarly, the 2011 report predicts visa liberalization in this region to lead to increased numbers of refusals of entry and “unfounded” asylum applications, creating more work for border control authorities who must check SIS for alerts on people who would previously have had their visa rejected (Frontex, 2011a). The report substantiates this by
pointing to the spike in asylum applications by Serbian and Macedonian nationals after visa liberalization for them came into effect, although downplaying that this accounted for only a “marginal portion” of the passenger flow from the region (Frontex, 2011a, p. 21).

Frontex’s skepticism towards visa liberalization is not limited to Europe’s visa regime, however, but encompasses that of neighboring countries as well, illustrating the intense degree of securitization. The 2011 report is concerned with Turkey’s pursuit of its “so-called visa-free neighborhood policy” and plans to create a free movement zone of goods and persons with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon (Frontex, 2011a, p. 48, emphasis added) – similar to Schengen. The joint visa between Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Iraq (similar to the Schengen visa) is described as “increasing the number of nationals from risk countries able to travel to Turkey” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 49, emphasis added) and by implication to Europe. This concern reveals Frontex’s Eurocentric assumptions regarding Middle Easterners’ inclination to use Turkey as a transit stop to Europe (everyone’s presumed end destination in its eyes) and its suspicion towards similar free travel arrangements that exist in Europe. The term “risk countries” is not explained and is an explicitly securitizing term à la the Copenhagen School, fostering xenophobia.

More banal is the 2012 report’s description of globalization and international mobility as problematic for effective border control, placing “additional stress on border-control authorities to prevent irregular migration” (Frontex, 2012, p. 43, emphasis added). The report indicates Frontex’s deep-seated suspicion towards all forms of mobility, linking increased passenger flows with a heightened risk of “travellers with the intent to commit crime or terrorism within the EU” (Frontex, 2012, pp. 43–44, emphasis added). Here securitization switches to explicit, as we are dealing with serious threats such as terrorism (cf. Buzan et al., 1998). This crisis discourse is also evident in the Commission’s proposed amendment to the visa regulation, which allows for the temporary suspension of the visa waiver in “emergency situations” where member states are faced with a “substantial and sudden increase” of “illegal” stay, unfounded asylum applications, or rejected readmission applications to a third country (Frontex, 2012, p. 37). Here the discursive practice of obscuring is present, with the report not mentioning that limiting this legal route might actually produce more irregularized migration rather than less since people will be left with fewer choices (see Andersson, 2016). Despite visa liberalization being a safe way for refugees and migrants to get to Europe, the report’s description of it shows Frontex’s concern with
‘security risks’ rather than its potential to reduce suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border.

This is also evident in the 2014 report, which emphasizes that visa liberalization for Pacific and Caribbean Island nations depends on the Commission’s “positive assessment of the risks involved, particularly in terms of irregular migration and security” (Frontex, 2014, p. 59, emphasis added). Here migration is explicitly securitized through its association with risk. More banally, local border traffic arrangements that facilitate mobility for residents in border areas (e.g., on the Eastern land border) are portrayed as problematic, with the report cautioning that these permits can be misused by ‘irregular’ migrants and criminal groups since they are easier to forge (Frontex, 2014, p. 24) – lumping these two categories together. Frontex’s reluctance towards visa liberalization is explicit in the 2018 report, which describes the increase of Iranians detected with fraudulent documents as partly “caused by the visa-free regime granted to Iranian nationals by the Serbian authorities” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 22, emphasis added), suggesting that they make use of Serbian visa liberalization to get to Europe.

Although the report notes that visa liberalization for Ukrainian nationals “contributed to the decrease in the number of Ukrainians misusing fraudulently obtained visas” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 23, emphasis) since these are no longer needed; the 2019 report warns that visa liberalization “suggests to travellers that they no longer need to justify the purpose and conditions of stay and present sufficient means of subsistence”, referring to the increased refusals of entry to Ukrainians (Frontex, 2019b, p. 9, emphasis added). Frontex thus securitizes visa liberalization, with the 2020 report describing Ukraine as “likely to be increasingly attractive as a transit country for nationalities that enjoy visa-free travel to Ukraine (e.g., Turkish nationals)”, which will “generate more demand for fraudulent Turkish documents” (Frontex, 2020, p. 21, emphases added). Similarly, the report highlights that following visa liberalization for Georgians, “there have been large increases in the refusal of entry of this nationality at air borders”, with “budget airlines particularly… respond[ing] to the new travel opportunities provided” (Frontex, 2020, p. 36, emphasis) – illustrating the classed dimension of securitization.

59 The fact that Frontex fails to acknowledge the benefits of visa liberalization for border authorities – who would not need to check passenger’s visas upon entry, which would reduce the waiting time at the border and facilitate the smooth flow of travelers – illustrates the extent to which migration is securitized in this field. Instead, the reasoning is that with the absence of this pre-screening conducted by embassies abroad, visa liberalization has added to the work of border guards in checking whether the travelers meet the other requirements of the SBC upon entry.
Visa Policy as a Pre-Filtering Mechanism

The second sub-theme illustrates the flip side of visa policy as mobility facilitating: that is, as mobility inhibiting. A major policy development in EUropean external(ized) border control was the entering into force of the Community Code on Visas in 2010, which set out common requirements for issuing uniform transit and short-term visas. At the time, more than 80% of the world population required a visa to enter EUrope, with only 37 countries being visa exempt (Frontex, 2011a, p. 11). Out of the 12.5 million uniform visas issued in 2009, 84% were short-stay visas of up to three months (typical ‘tourist visas’). More striking is the low number of Limited Territorial Validity visas issued (4%), which can be used by member states to allow a person entry for the purpose of applying for asylum (article 25, Regulation (EC) No 810/2009). Only to be granted on an “exceptional basis”, this type of visa is an alternative to dangerous journeys assisted by smugglers, with the European Parliament advocating for it to be made into an EU Humanitarian Visa following the 2015 ‘crisis’ (European Parliament, 2018a).60

Illustrating the discursive practice of obscuring in the reports, the statistics in the 2011 report debunk the myth of an uncontrollable number arrivals coming from outside EUrope, with the majority of uniform visas (60%) in 2009 issued on the continent, in Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and the Western Balkans (Frontex, 2011a, p. 11). Only 7% of all EU visa applications were rejected in 2009, which illustrates the exaggerated threat posed by mobile subjects. This number increases to 22% of all applications made in Africa, however, which is the continent with the top ten countries of visa refusal (as high as 83% of all applications made in the Central African Republic) (Frontex, 2011a) – illustrating the construction of racialized ‘risk nationalities’. The report does not consider the fact that the high number of visa rejections in African countries might explain why they feature as top nationalities in the ‘irregular’ migration statistics, being barred from using this legal means of travel. It also does not discuss the potential counterproductive effects of having a common list of visa-required nationals, which might bring

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60 The aim of the proposal was to “close the legal gap” in the EU asylum regime, which “does not foresee procedures, neither in the visa, nor in the borders or asylum acquis, for the admission to the territory of the Member States of persons seeking protection” – resulting in “the current paradoxical situation that there is in EU law no provision as to how a refugee should actually arrive leading to a situation that almost all arrivals take place in an irregular manner” (European Parliament, 2018a, pp. 6, 12, emphases added). The LIBE committee’s own-initiative legislative report points out that this has negative consequences not just for refugees but also for member states, who have less control over ‘spontaneous’ arrivals. The proposal was rejected by the Commission and the Council as a “subjective right to request admission” and “politically not feasible” (European Commission, 2019, p. 1, emphasis added).
more third country nationals under visa requirements than previously – limiting their possibilities to travel to Europe legally and inadvertently producing more irregularized journeys which are difficult to control. Thus, as a mobility control measure, restrictive visa policies might paradoxically produce more irregularized migration and deaths at the external(ized) border (see Düvell, 2011) – a possibility that Frontex never discusses.

Instead, the 2012 report emphasizes the potential of the Visa Information System’s (VIS) roll-out in North Africa to reduce irregularized migration. The report describes the role of the VIS as “streamlining checks” by enabling member states to check the information of the visa sticker number in a central database and verify that the photo and fingerprints of the visa-holder match the ones taken during the application process. This digital system is said to “deliver faster border checks, more accurate visa procedures, better protection of travellers against identity-theft and more security” (Frontex, 2012, p. 35, emphasis added). Securitization is here veiled in a technical discourse, facilitated by the discursive practice of obscuring. Banal securitization is evident in the prioritization of roll-out of the VIS in North Africa and the Middle East, which indicates that these are perceived as risky regions of origin and transit – illustrating the racialized construction of threat in the field of European external(ized) border control.

Securitization is also evident in the 2013 report, which emphasizes the role of embassies and consulates in preventing “illegal” stay in Europe through: “preventive measures” in the visa-issuing procedure, such as assessing the willingness of the person to return; cooperation and information exchange with other actors and member states; the identification of “specific categories of migrants who might misuse their visa”; and awareness raising in third countries of the “consequences of making fraudulent applications” (Frontex, 2013, p. 14, emphases added). The report identifies statistical data on visas as both an “important means of monitoring migratory movements” and an “efficient management tool” (Frontex, 2013, p. 14, emphases added), banally securitizing migration. The map of countries under visa obligations reveals the European visa regime’s racialized division of the world, with most of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia under visa requirements and North America, Australia, and New Zealand exempted (Frontex, 2013, p. 16). Moreover, the 2013 report notes that experience from countries with entry-exit systems at the border shows that this is useful in determining which nationalities are statistically more prone to overstay their visa – de facto generalizing ‘risk nationalities’.

The securitization of mobility in general is clear in the criteria that visa issuing authorities assess when examining applications, which include the following:
1. whether the applicant fulfils the entry conditions;

2. the risk of irregular immigration;

3. the applicant’s intention to leave the territory of the Member State before the expiry of the visa;

4. whether the applicant presents a risk to the security or public health of the Member State. (Frontex, 2013, p. 18, emphases added)

Security logics inform both the criteria and their order, with the “risk” of irregularized migration featuring second and the term risk appearing in two out of the four criteria – with visa applicants potentially constituting a risk in no less than three different ways (see Scheel, 2022, for the “trickster narrative” in EU visa policy). The report does not explain what criteria are used to determine whether a person is deemed to pose a risk, demonstrating the discursive practice of obscuring. Similarly, the report does not discuss the risk to visa applicants that decisions on their visa are made on the basis of generalizing statistics, which discriminates towards applicants from identified ‘risk countries’. As Bigo (2014, p. 219, emphases added) points out, this population is:

The most invisible and simultaneously the most numerous… They have been made undesirable in the name of predictions concerning their future behavior, predictions that are constructed from the actions of others. They have become prisoners of data double-associations and virtual anticipations.

This broader theme has demonstrated Frontex’s deep-rooted suspicion towards mobility in general, indicated by the reports’ favoring of visa policy as a mobility inhibiting rather than facilitating tool. This illustrates that securitization extends to regular mobility as well, although not to the same degree as for ‘irregular’ mobility. Nevertheless, as Bigo (2014, pp. 218–219, emphases added) argues, “these ‘normal’ travellers have the impression of moving freely, because surveillance does not stop them. They mistake speed for freedom – never realizing how easily they can change category and become undesirables”.

**Constructing Criminalizing Categories**

The third theme explores the securitized lexicon of Frontex’s border knowledge, demonstrating how figures such as the “clandestine migrant” are just as made-up
the “bread-and-butterfly” in Carroll’s (1872/1998, p. 151) looking-glass world. The terminology of this border lexicon is inventive, linking migration with crime by drawing on a law enforcement discourse and discursively creating categories of people (see Hacking, 1986, 1999). Securitization is banal in this theme, which is marked by the discursive practice of construction.

From “Illegal” to “Irregular”

A discursive change takes place already in the 2011 report, where “illegal migrants” and “illegal migration” are referred to as “irregular” instead, although references to “illegal border-crossings”, “illegal entry”, and “illegal stay” remain (Frontex, 2011). This shift in terminology from the 2010 report is not explained, despite remaining in subsequent reports. Although “irregular” is a less overtly criminalizing term than “illegal”, it still securitizes migration by contrasting this type of mobility with regular mobility – which the reports refer to as “passenger flows”. The discursive practice of obscuring is also at play here, with the reports not recognizing the political and legal construction of this dichotomy (De Genova, 2002; Düvell, 2011).61 Whereas the term “irregular” might not demand our “immediate, obedient attention” (Billig, 1995, p. 40) on par with the term “illegal”, it nonetheless banally securitizes this form of mobility. As Bigo (2002, p. 78, emphasis in original) points out, “because immigration is a catchword, it includes several aspects of ‘threat’ that are at once heterogenous but designated by the same word”.

The “Clandestine” Migrant

This overtly criminalizing term is first used in the 2011 report, referring to refugees and migrants crossing the border at an official border crossing point (rather than between) hidden in trunks or lorries (Frontex, 2011a, p. 30). Whereas the 2010 report refers to this as “clandestine entry”, drawing attention to the means of entry (i.e., concealed), the 2011 report makes the migrant by association also “clandestine”. This illustrates the discursive practice of construction, where Frontex’s border knowledge effectively makes up people (see Hacking, 1986, 1999), with the “clandestine migrant” being just as artificial as the “rocking-horse-fly” in the looking-glass world (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 149) – albeit with

61 Fitzgerald (2019, pp. 25–27) describes how Jews fleeing to British Mandatory Palestine in the interwar period and during WWII were perceived as “illegal immigrants” rather than “refugees”. Wodak (2020, p. 237) also notes how right-wing populist discourses subsume all foreigners under one category, “illegal immigrants”, which simultaneously criminalizes them.
criminal undertones. The subsequent reports revert to the term “clandestine entry”, however, with no further explanation.

*The “Bona Fide” Traveler*

This category features already in the 2011 report, understood as “legitimate passengers” who cross at official border crossing points and present the necessary travel documents (Frontex, 2011a, p. 6). Meaning “in good faith” in Latin, the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2022a) defines “bona fide” as “genuine” and “sincere”, with “the absence of fraud or deception”. By using this term in distinction to ‘irregular migrant’, the latter by association comes to signify an ‘illegitimate’ person who does not qualify as a ‘traveler’ but is presumed to (over)stay – illustrating the temporal dimension of the ‘irregular’/‘regular’ binary as well (see also Silberstein, 2020; or Wodak, 2020, for how right-wing discourses make this distinction for highly-skilled migrants). As Billig (1995, p. 66) points out, the categorization of a group entails the “categorical distinction” from another, which is imagined to be “distinct”. Distinguishing between different types of mobility in this way casts ‘irregular migration’ as the antithesis to bona fide travel – with the latter to be facilitated at the expense of the former, which must be monitored and controlled. Securitization is thus here banal, derived from this juxtaposition which affords the terms different meanings. With Frontex’s discursive reproduction of these opposing categories throughout the reports, their very construction falls out of sight as they become increasingly naturalized (cf. Fairclough, 2015) in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control.

*“Modus Operandi”*

“Modus operandi” is an implicitly criminalizing term, which is used in the reports to describe the different ways in which smugglers, refugees, and migrants try to cross the external(ized) border ‘undetected’. The term is often used to describe the methods of criminals (Merriam-Webster, 2022b), with this borrowing of terms from the law enforcement discourse to describe refugees and migrants’ mobility effectively criminalizing them (cf. “crimigration”, Bigo, 2014, p. 216). Securitization is thus banal here, being enabled by the discursive practices of construction and obscuring, with the term shrouding both the production of irregularity and refugees’ protection needs. “Modus operandi” is also only used to refer to the efforts by smugglers, refugees, and migrants to navigate the restrictive EUropean border regime rather than the latter itself, which has far more innovative tools than the people trying to traverse these borders on foot.
The “Document Fraudster”

The last figure of migration in the reports is the “document fraudster”, which is used to refer to someone who is traveling with fraudulent documents. Introduced in the 2013 report, this term creates an own persona (cf. Hacking, 1986, 1999) with negative associations to crime. Syrians fleeing the civil war are reported to be the second most detected “document fraudster” in 2012, described as representing “a significant and increasing risk of document fraud” (Frontex, 2013, p. 39, emphasis added). The reasons for their flight and the lack of alternative pathways are not mentioned, with the report transforming them from refugees to risks that must be controlled, concerned with their ‘deviant’ mobility rather than their protection needs. Securitization is thus banal here as well, aided by the discursive practices of construction and obscuring.

The Irregular/Regular Binary

The fourth theme relates to Frontex’s demarcation between ‘irregular’ and regular mobility, with the former portrayed as in need of restriction and the latter facilitation (see also Campesi, 2022). Demonstrating “the ambivalent nature of Europe’s attitudes to borders” (Hellström, 2015, p. 35, emphasis added), this artificial binary is a central feature of Frontex’s border knowledge (see also Silberstein, 2020), which reproduces it and obscures the very construction of these categories through laws, policies, and practices on the ground (De Genova, 2002; Düvell, 2011; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Securitization is banal in this theme, which is underpinned by the discursive practices of reproduction and obscuring. This arbitrary dichotomy is evident already in the 2011 report, which emphasizes the need for “registered traveler programs” and “risk analysis-driven” border checks in order to “facilitate bona fide passenger flows” in a time of increased global mobility (Frontex, 2011a, p. 6, emphasis added). Similarly, the 2012 report has separate sections dealing with “border controls (visas and passenger flow)” and “irregular migration” (Frontex, 2012, p. 3), treating the two as distinct phenomena, and stressing that busy land border sections require “an optimal mobilisation of resources” to not hamper the mobility of “bona fide travellers” (Frontex, 2012, p. 12, emphasis added). The reports’ systematic references to regular mobility as “passenger flows” or “bona fide travellers” reinforces the divide between this and ‘irregular’ mobility, which banally securitizes the latter.

Frontex’s border knowledge reproduces a similar division in this field made between ‘intra-EU mobility’ and ‘secondary movements’, with the former
referring to EU/Schengen citizens and the latter refugees and migrants, even though both terms describe movement in the same geographical area, just not by the same category of person moving. Illustrating the legal construction of different categories of travelers, the 2013 report emphasizes that “[EU] citizens enjoying free movement are subject to minimum checks, while third-country nationals, whether they require visas or not, are subject to more thorough checks, as defined by the Schengen Borders Code” (Frontex, 2013, p. 13, emphases added). The report applauds member states’ deployment of “Automated Border Checks” as an “important strategy for efficiently processing increasing passenger flows”, underlining that “at many airports in the EU, the top priority is now on reducing the time for check-in, security and passport control” (Frontex, 2013, p. 14, emphases added) – accelerating mobility for the privileged few. Securitization is here banal, with ‘irregular’ mobility juxtaposed with its regular counterpart and thus in need of deceleration.

The ‘irregular’/‘regular’ binary thus brings with it a trade-off between security and mobility, which is evident in the 2014 report’s warning that with the continued increase in international travel it will become difficult to maintain the “dual objective of facilitating travel and maintaining security” (Frontex, 2014, p. 20, emphasis added). It cites the Eastern land border route as an example, where increased traffic is linked with the risk of “clandestine entry”:

While checking all vehicles would introduce undue waiting time for many bona fide travellers, targeted checks on some vehicles meeting specific risk criteria would make it possible to determine with more precision the extent of the phenomenon and better prevent it. (Frontex, 2014, p. 41, emphases added)

Migration is here banally securitized through the reports’ discursive reproduction of this dichotomy, with refugees and migrants’ mobility being construed as needing to yield to both the mobility and security of bona fide travelers. Banal securitization is further illustrated by the fact that data is more readily available for ‘irregular’ mobility compared to the much higher number of regular mobility, which overemphasizes the scale of the former and the scope of the alleged threat posed by it (Düvell, 2011; Jeandesboz, 2020). This can be seen in the 2015 report, which notes that the future Entry/Exit System (EES) will facilitate EU-level data

62 The term ‘secondary movement’ is narrow and Eurocentric since it assumes that migration involves a linear path from A to B and that any movement after that is ‘secondary’, whereas for many their journey started long before they reached the EUropean external(ized) border (see Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). See also Bigo (2002, p. 80) for how the distinction between EU and non-EU citizens has created an association of ‘migrants’ with “colored people”.

gathering on regular crossings of the external border (Frontex, 2015, p. 12), which is not systematically recorded by member states. Similarly, there is scarce data on “passenger traffic” at the external land border (with only ten member states reporting this on a monthly basis in 2014), and the number of intra-EU air arrivals are consistently higher than arrivals from third countries (548 million compared to 143 million in 2013) – with the US being the main departure third country (Frontex, 2015, pp. 13–14). The 2016 report also notes that “despite this crisis situation at the borders in Southern Europe, most of the workload of border-control authorities at EU level continues to be directed towards checking the regular flow of passengers” (Frontex, 2016, p. 14, emphases added).

Frontex thus overplays the risk posed by irregularized migration by discursively obscuring both the extent of regular mobility and the role of visa overstay (rather than ‘irregular’ border crossing) as the main mode of entry to Europe for refugees and migrants (Düvell, 2011; Hansen & Pettersson, 2021). A discursive shift (Fairclough, 2015) takes place in the more recent reports, however, which blur the line between ‘irregular’ and regular mobility and expand securitization to encompass the latter as well. This shift is spurred by the introduction of additional security checks on visa-exempt travelers through the ETIAS (see also Campesi, 2022); the 2017 Schengen Borders Code (SBC) amendment requiring systematic database checks of all persons entering Europe (Frontex, 2018b, pp. 16–17); and the health risks posed by internal mobility during the Covid19 pandemic. This shift is evident in the 2018 report, which emphasizes that ETIAS’ “core function will be to provide an additional layer of control over travellers” who are visa exempt and “help improve internal security, limit public health risks and identify persons who may pose a risk before they arrive at the EU’s external borders” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 7, emphases added). Similarly, the SBC amendment brings regular mobility under a similar risk paradigm as ‘irregular’ mobility by subjecting them to systematic database checks, partly erasing the distinction between citizen and foreigner. The collapse of this construction thus increases the role of Frontex’s border knowledge in this field to deal with more potential ‘risky mobilities’.

Banal securitization here becomes ubiquitous, with no form of mobility escaping its reach.63 The institutionalization of securitization (Buzan et al., 1998) for regular mobility as well illustrates securitization’s normalization in the field of European external(ized) border control, with no alternative responses to

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63 As Bigo (2014, p. 219, emphases added) notes, “the invisibilization of the dataveillance for well-off, normalized travellers does not make them freer, just less aware that they are at risk of becoming ‘abnormalized’.”
mobility being conceivable. The ‘irregular’/‘regular’ binary becomes even more blurred in the reports following the Covid19 pandemic, with the indiscriminate health risk posed by the corona virus making distinctions based on external and internal EU mobility meaningless. This is illustrated by the 2020 report’s section on “pandemics and border control”, which focuses on the risks posed by both regular and ‘irregular’ mobility (Frontex, 2020, p. 38). The report highlights difficulties such as screening asymptomatic travelers, with the consequence that “measures such as quarantining all travellers and/or altogether closing the borders have been introduced” (Frontex, 2020, p. 38, emphases added). The report emphasizes the unparalleled scope of these travel restrictions for regular travelers and EU citizens:

What has ensued within the European Union goes well beyond the reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen area. Rather it constitutes a closing down of the borders to whole groups of travellers, in some cases even Union citizens.

(Frontex, 2020, p. 38, emphases added)

Thus, whereas the 2015 ‘crisis’ saw internal border controls reinstated to keep out refugees and migrants, the scope of the controls during Covid19 were broader, partly dissolving the distinction between ‘irregular’ and regular mobility. This theme has thus demonstrated Frontex’s discursive reproduction of the ‘irregular’/‘regular’ binary but also its subsequent muddling, the former which securitizes migration and the latter which normalizes securitization.

**Risk Analysis as the Panacea**

The fifth theme is different from the others in that it focuses on the role of Frontex’s border knowledge in preventing unwanted migration. Securitizing migration in banal ways through its association with risk, the theme portrays risk analysis as a “magic bullet” (Paul, 2017, p. 689) and strengthens Frontex role as a knowledge producer in this field. The discursive practice of obscuring characterizes this theme, with Frontex presenting its risk analyses as comprehensive and technical in nature, which veils their securitized ontology and epistemology, state-centric scope, and lack of focus on fundamental rights (Campesi, 2022; Horii, 2016). This theme is present already in the 2011 report, which boasts that the CIRAM model (see Figure 8) helps to “effectively balance”

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64 The DG Home official working with Schengen and external borders was busy in the spring of 2021 with the launching of the common EU digital Covid certificate to harmonize member states’ travel restrictions and re-facilitate internal mobility among vaccinated travelers (interview 15/4/21).
resources against “identified risks”, ensuring the “protection of the area of freedom, security and justice” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 7, emphasis added). This technocratic framing of risk analysis is also evident in the 2012 report, which introduces a special symbol for the risk analysis reports, which takes the form of a triangle shaped arrow with a dot in the middle, signifying the importance of risk analysis:

Metaphorically, the arrow represents the cyclical nature of risk analysis processes and its orientation towards an appropriate operational response. The triangle is a symbol of ideal proportions and knowledge, reflecting the pursuit of factual exactness, truth and exhaustive analysis. The dot at the centre represents the intelligence factor and the focal point where information from diverse sources converges to be processed, systematised and shared as analytical products. Thus, Frontex risk analysis is meant to be at the centre and to form a reliable basis for its operational activities. (Frontex, 2012, p. 2, emphases added)

Similar to Billig’s (1995) banal symbols of nationalism, this idealized description of risk analysis gives the impression of it as being a reliable and apolitical tool to prevent unwanted migration. The discursive practice of obscuring is evident here, however, with the report admitting that Frontex is unable to assess the effectiveness of member states’ border controls due to a lack of “systematic and reliable information” on their resource allocation, leaving risk analysis “limited to descriptive statistics of the administrative data provided by Member States” (Frontex, 2012, p. 9, emphasis added). By downplaying this data gap, Frontex presents itself as a credible border knowledge provider upon which political and operational decisions can be made without consulting other sources. As Paul (2017, p. 698, emphasis added) points out, “Frontex risk analysis has become a… litmus test for the necessity of proposed border control operations and funding schemes”.

The 2012 report further presents risk analysis as a managerial tool “ensuring the optimal allocation of resources within constraints of budget, staff and efficiency of equipment”, which helps “decision-makers in setting priorities… formulating counter-measures and… designating operational targets”, with the CIRAM model combining an “assessment of threats and vulnerabilities… with an assessment of their impacts” (Frontex, 2012, pp. 6, 9, emphases added). By drawing on the discursive practice of obscuring, the report here de-politicizes and sanitizes risk analysis, not mentioning that refugees and migrants are the potential “threats”, “operational targets” and objects of the “counter-measures”, with
“vulnerabilities” referring to the external(ized) border and not them. Securitization is here banal since the ‘risk’ that refugees and migrants pose is only implied (see also Bigo, 2002). Similarly, the 2013 report presents risk analysis as contributing to “informed decisions and concerted actions” (Frontex, 2013, p. 8, emphasis added), despite the reports being void of any fundamental rights considerations.

The 2015 report emphasizes the importance of Frontex’s risk analyses, featuring a chapter on “selected recommendations for risk mitigation” for member states (Frontex, 2015, p. 3). This includes five priority areas: “security aspects of border management”, “full identification of individuals entering the EU”, “knowledge management at operational and policy levels”, “specific third-country border management and border security risks”, and “multidisciplinary integrated training for EU border-control authorities” (Frontex, 2015, p. 3, emphases added). Securitization is explicit in the first recommendation, which concerns the role of border control authorities in combatting terrorism and trafficking, with the report calling for better national risk analysis capacities, “developing risk profiles of potential offenders and assessing passenger information” (Frontex, 2015, p. 53, emphasis added). The second recommendation relates to challenges in identifying refugees and migrants, which the report notes became a problem in 2014 with the “pressures faced at the border” (Frontex, 2015, p. 53, emphasis added). Securitization is here implicit, evidenced by the perceived need to properly identify people who cross the border. The report emphasizes “both a humanitarian and a security rationale” to this, since it would facilitate the identification of vulnerable people and “potential threats to internal security” (Frontex, 2015, p. 53, emphasis added). Here we see a discourse co-optation (cf. Fairclough, 2015, “re-contextualization”), with the report drawing on a humanitarian discourse in justifying the need for increased security measures at the border.

Securitization now becomes explicit, with the report maintaining that “with large numbers of arrivals remaining… unclassified… there is clearly a risk that persons representing a security threat enter the EU” (Frontex, 2015, p. 53, emphases added). These identification practices are framed as necessary for refugees and migrants’ subsequent categorization (cf. Bigo, 2014), which the report describes as a “challenge for border guards”:

How to differentiate between the asylum seeker who arrives at the external border with no papers and the economic migrant or a migrant who might pose a security threat attempting to abuse the system by claiming a false nationality? This
difficulty is… exacerbated in situations of intense migratory pressure. (Frontex, 2015, p. 53, emphases added)

Here we see how the degree of securitization intensifies during crises, when the potential risk posed by refugees and migrants becomes more acute due to the number of arrivals. Securitization is also evident in the type of responses proposed, with the report calling for screening and debriefing teams in order to improve the “identification process” and “intelligence and analytical capacities” (Frontex, 2015, p. 53) rather than opening safe and legal pathways for refugees and migrants. Securitization is latent in the third risk mitigation strategy that the report proposes, which is to ensure that information from border guards on the ground reaches the political level and “feed[s] into the devising of the higher level strategic policies taken at national and EU level” (Frontex, 2015, p. 54, emphasis added). Noting the “increasing sources of information… from the external borders”, the report contends that with “greater information comes a greater challenge in effectively utilising it”, especially in “emergency situations when large amounts of information are available but time is scarce” (Frontex, 2015, p. 54, emphases added). Migration is here banally securitized through Frontex’s framing of it as needing to be subjected to systematic analysis of the potential risks it poses (see also Bigo, 2002, 2014), which at the same time allows Frontex to strengthen its role as an epistemic actor in this field by presenting risk analysis as a fool-proof remedy during times of both crisis and non-crisis.

The 2015 report’s fourth risk mitigation recommendation regards cooperation with third countries, with the report noting that “there has… been a tendency to address the risks that the third countries’ border management circumstances represent to the EU borders” (Frontex, 2015, p. 54, emphases added). Contending that while this is a “legitimate concern… it can also lead to a lack of incentive for third countries to cooperate if the approach is too EU-centric” (Frontex, 2015, p. 54, emphases added). While this appears reflexive, the aim is still the same: protection of the European external(ized) border. This banally securitizes migration by framing it as something that the border needs to be protected from. The fifth recommendation illustrates the the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, with the report describing proper training of staff and inter-agency cooperation as key in “mitigat[ing] the threat arising during emergencies at the borders”, which is important when “a potential humanitarian crisis is unfolding” (Frontex, 2015, p. 55, emphases added). Here we see how the report draws on the same security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses as the other reports in justifying Frontex’s risk
mitigation strategies as providing security for both Europe and refugees and migrants. This works to legitimize securitization and contribute to its normalization by portraying it as ‘commonsensical’ (see Fairclough, 2015).

The 2016 report securitizes migration by introducing a set of risk-based future scenarios, which are concerned with possible migratory movements. The report stresses that “basing future analyses merely on trend analysis or environmental scans will no longer be effective”, and includes a chapter outlining “a series of alternative future scenarios” for member states to use as a “foresight instrument” (Frontex, 2016, p. 5, emphases added). The scenarios are to serve as a “basis for an annual monitoring of changes in the environment in which the Agency operates… spanning a large variety of possible futures” (Frontex, 2016, p. 8, emphases added). The scenarios were developed by a company specialized in scenario development, using a “computer-aided method” to distill the selected scenarios “among millions of combinations” (Frontex, 2016, p. 11, emphasis added). The scenarios illustrate the temporality of risk, with Frontex monitoring risks not just in the present but also in the future (see also Amoore, 2013; Rhinard, 2019). Through this exercise, Frontex banally securitizes migration by treating it as something that not only has to be constantly monitored but also predicted, to the extent that even potential migratory movements must be mapped so that contingency plans can be put into place (see also Bigo, 2002, 2014).

Portraying risk analysis as a ‘cure-all’, the report emphasizes that the scenarios are for different stakeholders (including member states) to “foresee strategic changes as early as possible, so that decision makers… can prepare, react or proactively decide” (Frontex, 2016, p. 54, emphases added). The focus of the scenarios are broad, including not only migratory ‘risks’ but “general developments from economy, society and geopolitics” (Frontex, 2016, p. 54, emphasis added). The scenarios were developed through several steps, which included the detection of “key factors” driving developments; projections of how these could develop in the future; a boiling down into “seven possible futures”; and an assessment of their likelihood to materialize and consequences (Frontex, 2016, p. 54). Being presented as a holistic exercise, the scenarios supposedly “cover all imaginable developments within the next 5-10 years”, and should be continuously monitored (Frontex, 2016, p. 55, emphasis added). Banal securitization is evident in the focus on migration in the different “drivers” of the scenarios, which include: 1) European integration (more/less or at different speeds); 2) global pressure (external events); and 3) level of migration (high/low).

Migration is also salient in the different scenarios, with the first two (“attrition of the European Union” and “a passive European Union”) predicting a weakened
EU, where increased migration leads to fear, nationalism, and an intensified security focus, with member states acting according to their own self-interests rather than through the EU (Frontex, 2016, p. 56). Conversely, four scenarios (“managed diversity”, “restrictive policies”, “multi-speed Europe”, and “more Europe”) forecast more EUropean cooperation (Frontex, 2016, p. 57). The last scenario, “open doors”, is presented as the most unlikely, described as a future where “external borders loose relevance in a peaceful world” which is “able to breathe again as conflicts can be solved and environmental degradation… slowed down” (Frontex, 2016, p. 57, emphases added). This is the only scenario where crime and terrorism are no longer threats and EUrope’s spread of liberal values results in a permissive migration policy, as “migration is not seen as a security problem” (Frontex, 2016, p. 57 emphasis added). The fact that there is only one scenario where migration is de-securitized illustrates securitization’s normalization in this field, with the de-linking of migration from risk only being possible in a utopian future.

The scenario exercise reveals that Frontex believes that migration will continue to be treated as a security issue in the foreseeable future, with alternative approaches implied to be unrealistic. This outlook thus works to normalize securitization, since de-securitized responses have no place in the future projected by Frontex. The same is the case for fundamental rights and the economic benefits of migration, with the take-away message being that if EUrope wants to stave off unwanted migration, it needs to do so together through restrictive policies.65 Banal securitization is here enabled by the discursive practice of obscuring, with the aim of the scenarios being to create “a reference platform for knowledge” to help identify “options for actions” (Frontex, 2016, p. 59, emphases added). The report does not mention the limited type of data that goes into this “reference platform”, however, which creates an orientation towards only certain different futures. Instead, Frontex frames its expertise as indispensable to EUropean policymakers, being the only actor able to look into the specific future that it has created (cf. Beck, 2006). Within this restraining frame of reference, border control becomes locked in a self-reinforcing state of perpetual securitization which becomes difficult to break (cf. Andersson, 2014; Williams, 2016), with the risk that the scenarios become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The discursive practice of obscuring is thus a key feature of the scenarios, which de-politicize risk analysis by portraying it as an objective science, although

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65 It is revealing that the worst-case scenario (“a passive European Union”) is described as the one closest to the current situation, characterized by a high security orientation, internal border controls, and inefficient cooperation on border control and asylum (Frontex, 2016, p. 58).
“normative judgement can never be escaped in risk assessment” (Paul, 2017, p. 691, emphasis added). Distilling the future into simplistic scenarios provides an image of control, despite being a premeditated future that masks its securitized foundations. The risk analysis reports’ standardization over time also normalizes this specific format of reporting and presents Frontex’s border knowledge as a plausible situational picture of the EUropean external(ized) border. This de-politicization is also evident in the reports’ visual discourse, with pictures of the Situation Centre and HQ offices with computers and maps laying around (Frontex, 2018b, pp. 26–27), illustrating the ostensibly technical work that goes into border control. As Paul (2018, p. 232, emphases added) points out:

Through its very application to the case of migration, risk analysis normalizes migration-related border risks as scientifically assessable risks, discursively equates them to the health threats usually targeted with risk analysis in food safety and... legitimizes pre-emption.

Frontex thus projects migration’s “assumed adverse impact, costs and benefits as taken-for-granted rather than open to political discussion” (Paul, 2017, p. 692, emphasis added), normalizing securitization by making it seem ‘commonsensical’ (Fairclough, 2015). This theme has demonstrated how Frontex frames its border knowledge as essential to informed decision-making in this field, pretending to be in possession of an exact knowledge despite it being underpinned by unascertainable cause-and-effect explanations (see also Horii, 2016; Paul, 2018). As the preceding has shown, this knowledge obscures just as much as it reveals, making it a one-sided information base which permits:

Specific groups to be blamed, even before they have done anything, simply by categorizing them, anticipating profiles of risk from previous trends, and projecting them by generalization upon the potential behavior of each individual pertaining to the risk category. (Bigo 2002, p. 81, emphases added)

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66 As Bigo (2002, p. 82, emphasis added) points out, security professionals present their role as “mastering a chaotic future with minimalist management focusing only on risk-groups (so-identified) or groups at risk”.

67 Tazzioli (201) similarly argues that information-sharing networks such as Eurosur function as a register for generating future migration risk scenarios rather than real-time surveillance, illustrating the construction of ‘risk’.
The Migration-Asylum-Crime Nexus

The sixth theme refers to Frontex’s conflation of migration, asylum, and crime, which is enabled by the discursive practice of obscuring. This nexus emerges in the reports leading up to the 2015 ‘crisis’, despite Frontex’s own statistics showing that a large part of what it refers to as ‘irregular migrants’ are in fact asylum-seekers, which is evidenced by the spike in asylum applications. The risk analysis reports obscures this by continuing to refer to these as ‘illegal border-crossings’, securitizing both migration and asylum-seeking. This theme first occurs in the 2014 report, which cites a record number of asylum applications in Europe in 2013, following the previous record in 2012 (Frontex, 2014, p. 48).

Banal securitization is evident here through the report’s emphasis on the burden it represents for border guards, who need to verify refugees and migrants’ identity and register their fingerprints in order to facilitate Dublin returns and prevent ‘secondary movements’.

Banal securitization is also clear in the report’s questioning of refugees and migrants’ deservingness. The report includes a textbox entitled “legitimacy of asylum claims”, which notes that there is “no legal definition of a ‘legitimate’ or ‘illegitimate’ claim” but that the recast Asylum Procedures Directive introduces the similar concepts of inadmissible/admissible or (manifestly) unfounded claims, which “may be the basis for a future classification” (Frontex, 2014, p. 49, emphases added). It cautions that until member states transpose this directive into national legislation and an “appropriate reporting is put in place, it will be difficult to address the question of international protection claim legitimacy” (Frontex, 2014, p. 49, emphasis added). Here the report banally securitizes migration by suggesting that these are not ‘genuine’ refugees – obscuring the high recognition rates for Syrians and Afghans, who were the most common nationalities among both “illegal” border crossings and asylum applicants in 2013 (Frontex, 2014, pp. 70, 76).

Similarly, the 2015 report notes that “data on asylum applications are not related to law-enforcement activities, but provides contextual information on movements of persons towards the EU” (Frontex, 2015, p. 40, emphasis added). It highlights the misuse of the asylum system to circumvent regular border controls, citing statistics that more than 30% of applications at the external border are “implicitly withdrawn” by asylum-seekers absconding and moving on to other member states (Frontex, 2015, p. 41). Securitization is here banal, with the report implying that these are ‘bogus asylum-seekers’. Reproducing the migration-asylum nexus, the report describes the “modus operandi” on the Western Balkan
route as demonstrating the “apparently tight relationship between illegal border-crossing and applications for asylum”, since most who cross to Hungary apply for asylum there or somewhere else later on (Frontex, 2015, p. 23, emphasis added). It does not discuss the role of restrictive migration policies and border controls in bringing about this linkage, however (European Parliament, 2018a; Fitzgerald, 2019). The report further notes the relevance of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive for border guards, with Article 8 mandating training for:

> Officials who may come into contact with persons seeking international protection (in particular during the surveillance of land or maritime borders or during border checks) so that they are able... to provide information on where and how an application [for asylum] can be lodged. (Frontex, 2015, p. 46, emphases added)

This demonstrates the role of border guards as a referral mechanism for asylum authorities at the border, an awareness which the official from the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) noted improved with this directive, with Frontex previously rejecting that it had “anything to do with asylum” (interview 12/4/21). The 2015 report also takes note of border guards’ new obligations in the recast Reception Conditions Directive, especially the identification and protection of vulnerable groups (Frontex, 2015, p. 46). The report’s discussion of the recast asylum acquis nevertheless reifies the link between migration and asylum, while simultaneously obscuring the limited options to reach Europe in safe and legal ways. Banal securitization is also evident in the 2016 report’s description of the record level of asylum applications in 2015 (totaling more than 1.3 million), stressing not the humanitarian aspects of this but that the large number of arrivals made it difficult for member states, especially Italy and Greece, to uphold the Dublin system (Frontex, 2016, pp. 30–31).

Similarly, instead of proposing to increase staff and resources for asylum authorities, the report discusses the Commission’s proposal of a common list of “safe countries of origin”, which would streamline member states’ practices and “increase the overall efficiency of their asylum system as concerns applications for international protection which are likely to be unfounded” (Frontex, 2016, p. 51, emphases added). Frontex here banally securitizes migration by focusing on measures to prevent refugees and migrants from arriving ‘irregularly’ rather than to ensure their right to asylum, treating them as ‘bogus asylum-seekers’. Similarly, the 2019 report draws attention to the declining recognition rates (Frontex, 2019b, p. 23), inferring that irregularized migrants are ‘undeserving’ since they will likely have their asylum application rejected. The discursive
practice of obscuring is evident here, however, with the report downplaying the lower level of “illegal” border crossings compared to asylum applications, which indicates that most of these are de facto asylum-seekers.

Securitization becomes more explicit in the 2020–21 reports, where this theme gets a new affix which links migration and asylum with crime. This is clear in the 2020 report’s section entitled “an integrated asylum-migration picture by EASO, Europol and Frontex” (Frontex, 2020, p. 30, emphasis added), where migration, asylum, and cross-border crime are treated as intertwined phenomena. The first paragraph asserts that:

The Schengen area is one of the most important achievements of the European Union. The abolition of internal borders allow EU citizens… tourists and professionals to move freely among 26 countries without being subject to passport or border controls. Yet, while providing countless benefits to genuine travellers, freedom of movement also facilitates less legitimate movements and the activities of ill-intentioned people who are able to enter the Schengen Area. This means that strengthening the EU’s external borders and the effective implementation of the Common European Asylum System are essential elements in delivering internal security to European citizens. (Frontex, 2020, p. 30, emphases added)

Beyond drawing a distinction between “genuine” travelers and “less legitimate movements” which become reduced to the act of movement itself, Frontex here explicitly securitizes asylum-seeking by framing a functioning asylum system as “essential” in ensuring internal European security. Whereas the term “ill-intentioned” might refer to criminals rather than refugees and migrants, these categories are lumped together as threatening the functioning of both the Schengen area and the CEAS. The degree of securitization thus intensifies with Frontex’s discursive construction of the migration-asylum-crime nexus. Securitization is further facilitated by the 2020 report’s merging of a security and humanitarian discourse, which is apparent in its emphasis on the dual role of Frontex officers in the “hotspots”:

To register, screen and fingerprint incoming migrants and asylum-seekers, as well as identify and refer, in cooperation with EASO, those in need of international protection, while simultaneously supporting EU/SACs to detect and prevent migrant smuggling, human trafficking and other forms of cross-border crime, sharing relevant intelligence with national authorities and Europol. (Frontex, 2020, p. 30, emphases added)
In this excerpt we see a high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015), with the report framing the work of Frontex, EASO, and Europol as complementary, partly obscuring the difference between asylum-seeking, migration, and crime. The report further securitizes migration by constructing ‘risk nationalities’, underlining that certain nationalities are more prone to “remain illegally” instead of applying for asylum than others, singling out Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians (Frontex, 2020, p. 31). By drawing on the discursive practice of construction, the report conjures a common EUropean asylum-migration-crime picture, stressing that:

The past year remained challenging for national asylum, reception, border guard and law enforcement authorities in the EU/SACs. In this context, EASO, Europol and Frontex continued to invest efforts in supporting their stakeholders according to needs… Despite differences in their mandates, EASO, Europol and Frontex remain committed to cooperation in different aspects of their work, including analysis that contributes to a better understanding of the asylum and migration picture in the EU/SACs. (Frontex, 2020, p. 31, emphases added)

By emphasizing the ‘necessary’ cooperation between the EU’s asylum, border, and law enforcement agencies Frontex not only securitizes migration and asylum-seeking by linking it with crime but normalizes securitization by naturalizing this link. This is further illustrated by the 2021 report’s covering of asylum applications, “irregular” migration, smuggling, fraudulent documents, trafficking, and “illegal” stay under the same section (Frontex, 2021i, p. 26) – which is in contrast to the previous reports. Securitization thus oscillates from banal (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995) to explicit (Buzan et al., 1998) with the addition of ‘crime’ in this theme, which is supported by the discursive practices of reproduction, construction, and obscuring.

The Migration-Terrorism Nexus

The seventh theme is the most explicitly securitizing of all the themes in the reports, directly linking migration with terrorism. The discursive practices of reproduction and obscuring are key here, with the reports reproducing this linkage and conflating migration with terrorism. Although the nexus migration-terrorism nexus has long been asserted in the securitization literature (Huysmans, 2006; Léonard & Kaunert, 2019), it is not present in Frontex’s earlier risk analysis reports. This linkage first appears in the 2013 report, which includes a sub-section on “terrorist threats”, describing attacks on commercial flights and how this has
“gradually shifted aviation-related security measures towards more stringency… but at the same time complicated the life of bona fide passengers” (Frontex, 2013, p. 51, emphases added). The connection between migration and terrorism is invoked to justify “advance risk assessments” and international exchange of information, which is facilitated by the PNR directive, which the report describes as allowing border guards to (pre)screen travelers more efficiently.68 While securitization is implicit here, discernible from the report’s references to terrorist attacks such as 9/11 (see also Bigo, 2013), it becomes more explicit in the subsequent reports’ descriptions of the rise of ISIS and phenomenon of foreign fighters.

The 2014 report features a sub-section on “European foreign fighters in Syria”, noting that this has “significantly increased”, with the EU and member states discussing “ways to monitor and prevent the movements of young people to Syria” due to the “terrorist threat” that they might pose upon return (Frontex, 2014, p. 45, emphasis added). Warning of “terrorists’ movement”, the report stresses that “irregular” routes and smuggling networks might be taken advantage of if the costs and risks are lower than legal travel options; while conceding that “Frontex is not in a position to identify, nor does it have any information that suggests, any nexus between terrorist travel and irregular migration” (Frontex, 2014, p. 68, emphases added). Here the discursive practices of reproduction and obscuring are both at play, with the report reinforcing this nexus and obscuring the difference between irregularized migration and terrorism despite it having no data to support this claim. Securitization intensifies in the 2015 report, with the preface by the Executive Director underscoring that:

The already difficult problem of irregular migration was rendered even more complex by the tragic attacks in Paris in November 2015 and the growing threat from foreign terrorist fighters. This was a dreadful reminder that border management also has an important security component. (Frontex, 2015, pp. 7, 5, emphases added)

By drawing on the discursive practice of obscuring, the report gives the impression that the Paris attacks were committed by terrorists who entered

68 The PNR directive opens for sharing of passenger data between the US and member states. Shachar (2020, p. 40, emphases added) considers the development of such “pre-clearance systems” as an intrinsic part of the “shifting border”, creating a “powerful yet invisible electronic border that applies everywhere (adjusting itself to the location and risk-profile of the traveler) and is intentionally detached from and sequentially precedes the act of territorial admission, facilitating mobility for… trusted travelers while denying access to all others”.

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EUrope ‘irregularly’, when most of them were EUropean nationals. Similarly, the report highlights that the 2014–15 terrorist attacks in EUrope prompted a debate about border guards’ role in counter-terrorism, as well as linking the need for screening and identifying people crossing the external border with access to international protection (Frontex, 2016, p. 61). Here again we see how Frontex invokes a humanitarian discourse to justify security measures, constituting discourse co-optation (cf. Jensen, 2006). By framing security as a necessary corollary to fundamental rights, this border knowledge portrays more border control as leading to a better protection of rights, illustrating the inverted logics of its humanitarian border control (which we will return to in the next chapter).

The humanitarian discourse further moderates the declared threat posed by women and children, with the 2018 report describing their role as “support structures” for ISIS fighters and how “challenges are even more complicated when adding the… widows and orphans, since their involvement in violent activities… often remains elusive” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 30, emphases added). The care and control duality and politics of pity (Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) are evident here, with women by definition presumed to pose a lesser threat than men, rather deserving of ‘pity’. Securitization is banal here, with women and children treated more as a potential risk than an actual threat due to their husbands’ activities. More explicitly, the report emphasizes that “while… many migrants detected for illegal border-crossing are persons who are eligible for international protection, there are many challenges… in detecting those linked to terrorism, crimes, or… war crimes” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 31, emphasis added). By drawing on the discursive practices of reproduction and obscuring, the report here reproduces the migration-terrorism nexus while obscuring the difference between asylum-seekers and war criminals, with securitization being at its most intense so far (à la the Copenhagen School).

This extreme securitization is illustrated by the more recent reports’ concern with terrorism posed by regular mobility, with the 2018 report warning of “potential threats posed by EU citizens” and especially dual citizens (Frontex, 2018b, p. 31, emphasis added), rendering the latter second-class citizens in terms of suspicion. The 2019 report further reproduces the migration-terrorism nexus, with the preface by the Executive Director underlining that “border guards are… the first filter at the external borders when it comes to the detection of potential terrorist threats”, working closely with Europol (Frontex, 2019b, p. 7, emphases added). Here the discursive practice of obscuring is evident, with Frontex not discussing how increased border controls to filter out terrorists makes it more difficult for refugees and migrants to get to EUrope. Instead, the 2020 report treats
terrorism as a form of mobility similar to migration, with a section entitled “managing and interdicting terrorist mobility” (Frontex, 2020, p. 44, emphasis added). Illustrating the racialized aspect of securitization, the report remarks that although “terrorism is not exclusive to Islamist extremists… the main threat emanates” from them (Frontex, 2020, p. 44, emphases added).

By drawing on the discursive practice of obscuring, Frontex portrays the very mobility of terrorists as a threat, even referring to them as “travelling terrorists” (Frontex, 2020, p. 45). This illustrates that mobile forms of risk are deemed more serious than sedentary forms in this border knowledge, which illustrates Frontex’s securitized assumptions towards mobility in general. This is also demonstrated by the 2020 report’s emphasis on the importance of interoperability between migration databases and criminal ones, stressing that the purpose of border checks is to “prevent any threat to the internal security… of the Member States, irrespective of the origin of such threat – including where… [it] derives from Union citizens” (Frontex 2020: 44, emphases added; see also Bigo et al., 2016). Securitization is here extreme, with the 2021 report labeling terrorism a “global and enduring threat”, stressing that systematic “checks against databases must cover regular and irregular movements, at all types of borders and in all directions” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 33, emphases added). Similar to the theme the ‘irregular’/‘regular’ binary, the fear of terrorism expands the scope of securitization to include both types of mobility, legitimizing increased border controls and strengthening the role of Frontex’s border knowledge.

This theme thus comes the closest to the Copenhagen School’s definition of securitization as being about “existential threats” (Buzan et al., 1998). Frontex’s naturalization of the migration-terrorism nexus further normalizes securitization through its frequent securitizations of an intense degree, coupled by the lack of alternatives considered to combat terrorism (see Figure 5).

**Frontex’s Construction of Crisis**

The second cluster of themes demonstrates the productive role of crisis in Frontex’s border knowledge, with the reports drawing on the discursive practices

69 When discussing member states’ reintroduction of temporary border controls due to terrorist threats, the DG Home official working on Schengen and external borders highlighted their futility, since homegrown radicalization poses a larger threat (interview 15/4/21).

70 The reports also obscure the fact that “nation-states may commit far more violence than terrorists”, who “challenges the monopoly of violence, claimed by nation-states” (Billig, 1995, p. 91, emphasis added).
of inflation and inversion in order to normalize crises at the external(ized) border and as such a securitized response to them. Interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) plays a large role in this, with the reports drawing on the same crisis discourse, which over time accumulates.

The (Re)Production and Inflation of Irregularity, Risk, and Crisis

The eight theme illustrates Frontex’s discursive (re)production and inflation of irregularity, risk, and crisis at the external(ized) border. This sub-section will show how Frontex systematically exaggerates the supposed risk and crisis posed by refugees and migrants due to its methodology of counting border crossings rather than the people crossing (see also Sigona, 2015), which misrepresents the number of irregularized migrants and the scale of the ‘threat’ that they pose. Numbers are a “pivotal parameter for… scaling threat perceptions” (Vollmer, 2011, p. 336, emphasis added), which is illustrated by the reports’ construction of ‘risk nationalities’ on the basis of aggregate statistics. As Hellström (2006, p. 179, emphasis added) notes, “the construction of threats is pivotal for the justification of an enhanced pre-occupation with ‘security’”. This theme is evident in both the visual and textual discourse of the reports, which are interspersed with securitizing images of people crossing the border at night, climbing fences en masse, and hiding in vehicles to avoid detection. As we will see, the form and degree of securitization intensifies following the 2015 ‘crisis’.

The 2010 report deploys a criminalizing discourse, conflating refugees and migrants by referring to them collectively as “illegal migrants” and “illegal border-crossings”, the latter term which survives in subsequent reports. More explicitly, the report identifies visa overstays and the use of forged documents as the most common ways “illegal” migrants enter EUrope, linking it with “other criminal activities… such as the abuse of social benefits”, posing a “potential threat to the internal security of the EU if migrants are able to conceal a criminal or terrorist past” (Frontex, 2010, p. 3, emphases added). By consistently using the terms “economic” or “illegal” migrants rather than “asylum-seekers”, Frontex not only obscures refugees and migrants’ protection needs but also criminalizes them – rationalizing increased border controls in response. Here the discursive practice of obscuring is evident, with the reports making no attempt to establish the share of migrants contra asylum-seekers in their data, instead often presenting
the numbers of “illegal border crossings” next to the low recognition rates of asylum applications, as to imply that the majority are unfounded.\footnote{Recognition rates conceal the increasingly restrictive asylum regimes in Europe since the 1990s, where people with a de facto protection often have their application rejected.}

The 2010 report makes no mention of the fact that its statistical annex shows that the 2008 and 2009 numbers of new asylum applications made during the reporting period were almost twice as high as the annual number of “illegal” crossings (Frontex, 2010, p. 11), which does not back the assumption that most who cross the external(ized) border ‘irregularly’ do not have a protection need. Instead, the section on “applications for international protection” securitizes asylum-seeking, emphasizing that:

> Application for international protection is one of the main paths for illegal migration within the EU, with many undocumented asylum applicants deciding to stay illegally in the EU once their application has been rejected. (Frontex, 2010, p. 28, emphasis added)

By drawing on the discursive practices of construction, reproduction, and inflation, Frontex thus not only reports on ‘irregular’ migration but actively (re)produces and exaggerates irregularity by lumping together refugees and migrants in the same category. This is a banal way of securitizing migration which does not draw immediate attention to itself, but relates to the Paris School’s emphasis on securitization through categorization (Bigo, 2013).

A related characteristic of this theme is the reports’ inflation of risk and crisis. This is evident in the 2011 report, which concedes that irregularized migration “only represents a small proportion of the total movement across the borders, three quarters of which are EU nationals” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 5, emphasis added). The small scale of “irregular” contra regular mobility demonstrates both Frontex’s disproportionate focus on the former and the securitization of this form of mobility (see also Jeandesboz, 2020). In 2009, regular entries amounted to 660 million compared to 160,000 ‘irregular’ entries (Frontex, 2011a, p. 9), with the latter representing a mere 0.02% of all external border crossings. The report also identifies land and air border “flows” as much larger than maritime “flows” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 12), which debunks claims of an uncontrollable amount of ‘boat migrants’ coming to Europe. The exaggeration of migration as inherently risky also becomes clear when looking at the reasons for refusals of entry at the external border in the 2011 report, with the most common reasons being “no valid
visa or residence permit” (28%) and “no appropriate documentation justifying the purpose and conditions of stay” (23%) (Frontex, 2011a, pp. 60–61). The category “threat”,72 comes almost at the bottom of the list, comprising 2.3% of the total number of refusals across land, air, and sea borders.

The securitized discourse deployed in the reports is thus often at odds with Frontex’s own statistics, although this is never acknowledged. For instance, according to the 2011 report, out of the more than 100,000 people who were refused entry in 2010, only 2500 were considered a “threat”, which compared with the annual number of passenger flow in 2009 put this at a mere 0.0004%. Similarly, the report emphasizes that the detection of false documents reached the highest level since 2009, with a 20% increase between 2009 and 2010 (Frontex, 2011a, p. 13), despite this being low in absolute numbers when compared to the over 100,000 million annual travelers. Thus, by drawing on the discursive practices of obscuring and inflation, Frontex is able to exaggerate both the risks and crisis at the external(ized) border through its selective presentation of data. This subtle form of securitization is also evident in the reports’ visual discourse, with the 2012 report’s cover photo being the coastline of Lesvos as seen through a night vision camera (Frontex, 2012, p. 2), which invokes criminal connotations. Similarly, the section on “irregular migration” is followed by a section titled “other illegal activities” (Frontex, 2012, p. 3, emphasis added), which by association implies that the former is also an “illegal activity”.

The construction of (ir)regularity is illustrated in the report’s analysis of irregularized migration from Albania to Greece, which notes that this circular labor migration continued after visa liberalization, although since it is now considered “legal” – with Albanians able to cross through official border crossing points – this leads to less detections of “illegal” border crossing and stay (Frontex, 2012, p. 19; cf. De Genova, 2002). The risk analysis reports are also not consistent in their use of numbers vs. percentages, with the latter often masking an only marginal increase in total numbers. For example, a 100% increase in irregularized crossings at one border section might seem higher than it actually is if that section saw few arrivals the previous year, and it might also account for a small number of the EU total. Both are the case in the 2013 report, which discursively inflates irregularity by highlighting that “illegal” border crossings on the Eastern land border increased by 51% between 2011 and 2012, despite only totaling 1600 crossings (Frontex, 2013, p. 2). Here the discursive practices of inflation and

72 Defined as a person “considered to be a threat for public policy, internal security, public health or the international relations of one or more Member States” (Frontex, 2011a, pp. 60–61).
obscuring work together, with the (mis)presentation of statistics on this case-by-case basis producing a contorted image of the reality of the situation at the external(ized) border.73

Frontex’s inflation of irregularity is partly attributed to member states’ reporting practices, with the 2013 report noting that many member states reported asylum applicants as “illegal” stayers (Frontex, 2013, p. 41), which overstates the total number of “detections of illegal stay” and weakens both the validity and reliability of this indicator. This discursive practice also works in reverse, with the report deflating the risk posed by US nationals, who represent a large proportion of refusals of entry at UK airports, by cautioning that this number must be seen in relation to the fact that they represent far more arrivals than other nationalities and that the reasons of refusal are “mostly technical and not assessed… as a threat of irregular migration” (Frontex, 2013, p. 41, emphasis added). No similar caveats are presented for travelers from Middle Eastern and African countries, which illustrates the racialized aspect of securitization. The discursive practices of construction and obscuring are also evident in the 2014 report, which describes the situation at the Polish-Belarussian border, where “the migrants showed up without visas and then applied for asylum. Later on, they also applied for asylum in Germany” (Frontex, 2014, p. 7, emphases added). Although these people applied for asylum twice, the report refers to them as “migrants” rather than asylum-seekers, thus affording them irregularity. Securitization is here implicit, revealed by the choice of terminology (cf. Billig’s, 1995, emphasis on seemingly insignificant words), which illustrates Frontex’s perception of them as ‘bogus asylum-seekers’ who only made use of the asylum procedure in order to enter Europe.

This is contrasted with the report’s explicit securitization when describing that “the Spanish authorities warned of the permanent threat of migration to Melilla” (Frontex, 2014, p. 8, emphasis added), which anchors this “threat” both spatially and temporally. The reports’ reproduction and inflation of crisis becomes more pronounced during the 2015 ‘crisis’, with the 2015 report highlighting an increase in “illegal” border crossings on the Western Balkan route, although noting that this is a function of refugees and migrants transiting from the Greek-Turkish border towards other member states (Frontex, 2015, p. 22). This means that these numbers are double counted, which exaggerates the portrayal of a crisis at the external(ized) border. Similarly, the 2017 report notes that from 2016 the number

73 The use of numbers to stoke crisis is similar to what Vollmer (2011, p. 327, emphasis added) describes as “a traditional ‘numbers game’ pattern: an outcry for action”.

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of refusals of entry rather than people will be counted, since “for border management purposes, it is better to capture the number representing the workload for border-control authorities” (Frontex, 2017, p. 21, emphasis added). It partially attributes the 49% increase in refusals of entry from 2015 to 2016 to this change in reporting practice, which gives the impression that there is a larger ‘migratory pressure’ at the external(ized) border, although the same person might be refused entry several times and as such inflate the numbers. This (double) counting practice illustrates Frontex’s inflation of crisis at the external(ized) border, overstating the apparent risks posed by refugees and migrants.

The construction of irregularity persists in the 2017 report, which associates migration with crime by identifying smuggling and document fraud as “the most common criminal activities linked to the migration crisis”, despite Frontex’s document experts in the Greek hotspots only finding a minority of the documents examined to be fraudulent (Frontex, 2017, p. 23, emphasis added). This discursive practice continues in the 2018 report, which includes a table of the “purpose of illegal border-crossing”, with the categories “irregular migration”, “smuggling of good”, “other”, and “not available” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 44, emphasis added). The purpose “irregular migration” accounts for the majority of the border crossings, followed by the “not available”. This limited categorical framework masks information about the share of asylum-seekers that fall under the imprecise umbrella term “irregular migration” and as such blurs more than it reveals, potentially inflating the number of irregularized migrants and the scale of the ‘threat’ that they pose. Securitization is here banal, enabled by the discursive practice of obscuring.

This discursive practice is also evident in the 2020 report’s section “Destination EU – a globalized migration context”, which features a map illustrating the diverse nationalities of asylum-seekers, irregularized migrants, “illegal” stayers, and persons refused entry to Europe (Frontex, 2020, pp. 16–17). It ascertains that “the European Union continues to be a desirable destination for migrants”, with more than 180 nationalities reported under the above indicators in 2019, “clearly indicating the global extent of migratory pressure towards the EU” (Frontex, 2020, pp. 16–17, emphases added). However, this map obscures the fact that only 3.6% of the world’s population are estimated to be international migrants, which leaves the vast majority sedentary, as well as the fact that most refugee migration occurs between neighboring countries in the

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74 The report also does not explain how these “purposes” were determined or by whom, though presumably by border guards rather than the apprehended people, who would most likely cite ‘seeking asylum’ as a purpose rather than “irregular migration”.

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Global South, which hosts 86% of the world’s refugees (UNHCR, 2021). It also does not show the thousands of refugees and migrants that are pushed and pulled back at the external(ized) border every year or die trying to cross it. It is thus a typical “invasion map” (van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2019) which overstates the migratory risk facing Europe.

Drawing again on the discursive practice of obscuring, the report notes that “the migratory pressure in 2019 focused on the Eastern Aegean Sea and on Cyprus”, with the latter having with the largest number of asylum applications per capita (Frontex, 2020, p. 23, emphasis added). What these statistics indicate, however, is that many of these people are asylum-seekers rather than ‘irregular’ migrants, although the report does not refer to them as such. This inaccurate use of terminology thus constructs these people as undeserving and implicitly securitizes them. Illustrating the construction of crisis, the 2020 report further emphasizes that:

Analysis will remain an important aspect of Frontex’s work in the area of secondary movements in years to come. The use of EUROSUR as the main framework for information exchange and cooperation between the Agency and Member States… will thus be crucial in fulfilling this role, helping Frontex to maintain an up-to-date and accurate European situational picture. (Frontex, 2020, p. 55, emphases added)

Here the report re-locates the ‘migration crisis’ from the external(ized) border to within Europe, now taking the form of “secondary movements” rather than “illegal border crossings”. This allows Frontex to argue that the crisis persists despite the drop in arrivals, affording its border knowledge continued relevance in the field of European external(ized) border control.

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75 Only one EU member state, Germany, features in the list of top ten refugee hosting countries in 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). This ranking has not changed much the last two decades, with only Germany and the UK featuring in the top ten list in 2005 and 2010 (UNHCR, 2006, 2011). Turkey is the country that has hosted the most refugees worldwide since 2014 (3.7m), hosting 15% of all displaced persons worldwide, most of whom are Syrians (UNHCR, 2019b, 2021).

76 Deaths at Europe’s external(ized) border are estimated to be at least 40,000 between 1990–2019 (IOM, 2023a; Last, 2015; The Migrant Files, 2016; United for Intercultural Action, 2020). The number of push and pull backs are even higher (Aegean Boat Report, 2020a; HRW, 2022; Jones, 2020).
The Construction of ‘Risk Nationalities’

This sub-theme concerns Frontex’s discursive construction of ‘risk nationalities’, which is illustrated by the reports’ breakdown of the “indicators of irregular migration” according to nationality. This theme is explicit in the 2012–14 reports, which introduces lists of nationalities according to who comprises the largest share of detections of “illegal” border crossings, “illegal” stay, refusal of entry, and return. By drawing on the discursive practice of construction, Frontex is able to portray certain nationalities as riskier than others through the creation of these nationality lists, both racializing them and securitizing their mobility. The 2012 report visualizes this classification in nationality maps (see Figure 9) and “top ten” lists in the statistical annex (Frontex, 2012, pp. 17, 47).

Figure 9: Frontex map of ‘risk nationalities’ (Frontex, 2012, p. 17).

This risk construction expands in the 2013 report, which includes not only the number of refusals of entry broken down according to “top ten nationalities” but also the reasons for refusal of entry and what share of the total each nationality accounts for. Assembling numbers in this way amounts to a statistical (dis)aggregation of fear which stigmatizes certain nationalities and informs EUROpean policymakers which nationalities to distrust based on their propensity to be ‘detected’ trying to get to EUrope, regardless of their protection needs. In 2012, the ‘riskiest’ nationality in terms of refusal of entry was Croatian (Frontex, 77 See Achiume (2022) for a critique of contemporary “racial borders” as a relic of imperialism.)
2013, pp. 72–73), although since Croatia joined the EU shortly after it does not feature in subsequent reports since they only deal with third country nationals. This illustrates Frontex’s securitized assumptions towards mobility, as threats can only come from the outside, not within (except for secondary movements). Drawing on the discursive practice of construction, the 2014 report uses visa refusals to construct ‘risk nationalities’, arguing that the rate of refusals in a third country can serve as a proxy to “determine the countries of origin presenting the highest risk of irregular migration” (Frontex, 2014, p. 17, emphases added). This is despite Frontex having no data on the reasons for refusals of visa applications or the nationality of the applicants in that country, which is based on the location of the issuing member state’s consulate. Securitization is thus here moderate, being more overt than the form described by the Paris School but not as exceptional as that of the Copenhagen School.

Further drawing on the discursive practice of construction, the 2016 report introduces two new indexes which are used to score the ‘riskiness’ of countries of origin and transit. The section on “key countries of origin and transit” features the “transit country index” and “origin country index”, which have been developed to “gauge the relative importance of a set of third countries” from where most refugees and migrants come from and/or transit through on the way to Europe (Frontex, 2016, p. 36). The selected countries account for more than 90% of “illegal” border crossings in 2015, and include African (origin and transit), Middle Eastern (origin), and Western Balkan (transit) countries. The “transit country index” effectively transforms countries neighboring Europe into ‘risk countries’, ranked based on the “risk of illegal border-crossing at the external borders” (Frontex, 2016, p. 36, emphasis added). The scale ranges from 0–5, with the Western Balkans and Turkey coming first with the highest risk (3) in 2015, followed by Libya (2), and Morocco (1) (Frontex, 2016, p. 36, emphasis added).

The “origin country index” follows the same logic, based on the nationality of the majority of refugees and migrants crossing the external borders “illegally” (Frontex, 2016, p. 37). In 2015, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan received the next to highest score (4), followed by the Horn of Africa and Western Africa (3). These indexes illustrate Frontex’s construction of risk, securitizing refugees and migrants by ranking them according to the collective ‘risk’ that they pose due to their citizenship. Here the discursive practices of construction, inflation, and obscuring are evident, with the indexes only considering the means of entry and not “subsequent asylum applications” (Frontex, 2016, p. 37). This means that the risk of irregularized migration is exaggerated since the indexes do not distinguish
between asylum-seekers and migrants, which make them ‘asylum indexes’ as much as ‘risk indexes’. This wider theme has thus illustrated how Frontex’s border knowledge securitizes migration by both constructing and reproducing refugees and migrants’ irregularity and riskiness, which in turn inflates the perception of a crisis at the external(ized) border.

The Inversion and Normalization of Crises

The ninth theme illustrates Frontex’s discursive inversion and normalization of crises at the EUropean external(ized) border. No less than four different crises feature in the reports in the time span of a decade, starting with the 2010 Evros ‘border crisis’, followed by the 2011 Arab Spring, the 2015 ‘migration crisis’, and the Covid19 pandemic. These crises refer to an increased number of refugees and migrants trying to cross the external(ized) border and the professed threat that they pose, with the reports portraying them as ‘security crises’ rather than humanitarian ones. The discursive practices of inflation, inversion, and obscuring undergird this theme, with Frontex not only reproducing these crises but exaggerating them – especially the 2015 ‘crisis’ – with crisis becoming normalized in its aftermath. Crises are thus both cumulative and productive in Frontex’s border knowledge, rationalizing increased border controls in response to irregularized migration and deaths at the borders (see also Perkowski et al., 2023) and as such furthering securitization’s normalization.

This theme also illustrates the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, which draw on both each other and the same security and crisis discourses in order to portray a picture of a constant crisis at the external(ized) border despite the decreasing number of arrivals following 2015. Securitization intensifies in both degree and form in the lead up to the 2015 ‘crisis’, before slightly reducing after.

*Evros: The First ‘Crisis’*

The first claimed crisis in Frontex’s border knowledge took place in 2010 in the Greek Evros region bordering Turkey. The 2011 report notes that the Eastern Mediterranean saw a large increase in irregularized crossings that year, becoming the “main channel of irregular migration into the EU”, with Turkey being the main transit country (Frontex, 2011a, p. 14, emphasis added). Although similar to 2008 numbers, the increase is referred to as “acute” and “undoubtedly the main

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78 This excludes the standoff on the Greek-Turkish border in the spring of 2020, the Polish-Belarussian ‘border crisis’ in 2021–22, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
challenge at the EU level” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 14, emphasis added). Drawing on a crisis discourse, the report describes the arrivals as “one of the largest single episodes of illegal border-crossing into the EU ever recorded” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 14, emphasis added). This is exacerbated by the “problem” of onward movements to other member states, which the report claims concerned most of the refugees and migrants, who used taxi services at the border in Macedonia or hid in trucks to get to Serbia. Here securitization is explicit (Buzan et al., 1998), facilitated by the discursive practice of reproduction, with the report reproducing the crisis discourse in this field.

The discursive practice of obscuring is also evident here, with the report not mentioning that the majority of the arrivals came from ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq, and African countries – obfuscating both their protection needs and Europe’s role in creating instability in these countries through colonization, military interventions, and weapons export (De Lauri, 2018; Fotiadis & Bhriain, 2021; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019). Frontex thus also inverts the crisis from a humanitarian one to a security one, which is further illustrated by the report’s description of the first deployment of a rapid border intervention (RABIT) to the Greek-Turkish land border as “clearly reinforcing the position of Frontex in relation to third-country authorities”, who now are aware of its ability to respond to “emergency situations” (Frontex, 2011a, p. 45).

Here we also see how Frontex draws on both a security and crisis discourse in describing the situation at the external(ized) border.

The 2011 Arab Spring: The Second ‘Crisis’

Just a year later this securitized crisis discourse intensifies, with the 2012 report noting a 35% increase in “illegal” border crossings in 2011, describing the Arab Spring as a major development in “irregular migration pressure” at the external border, with the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes comprising “two hotspots” accounting for 86% of all “detections” (Frontex, 2012, pp. 12, 14, emphases added). The report warns that the Greek-Turkish border is “likely to remain one of the areas with the highest number” of irregularized migrants, “taking advantage” of Turkey’s liberal visa policies and the expansion of Turkish airlines to transit through Turkey and enter the EU “illegally” (Frontex, 2012, p. 5, emphasis added). Here securitization is strong in both degree and form (see Figure 4), being enabled by the report’s drawing on a crisis discourse.
The 2015 ‘Migration Crisis’: The Third Crisis

Contrary to EUropean policymakers’ claims that the 2015 ‘crisis’ came as a surprise, Frontex’s risk analysis reports predicted increased irregularized migration through the Southern borders already from 2012. Even the Frontex officials themselves disagree on this, with the interviewee working in the Situation Centre at the time claiming that it could not have been foreseen, whereas his colleague working more closely with operational analysis said that they “saw it coming” (interviews 23/6/21, 15/7/21).

These predictions are repeated with increased intensity in every risk analysis report leading up to the 2015 ‘crisis’, illustrating Frontex’s discursive reproduction of crises. The 2013 report notes that the Greek-Turkish border (which saw the most crossings in 2015) has seen “considerable numbers” of “illegal” border crossings since 2008 and that alternatives to this route is “being explored by facilitators”, including the Aegean Sea (Frontex, 2013, p. 6). It highlights the increase of Syrian irregularized migrants since 2011, who constitute the most rapidly growing “detected” nationality at the external border (Frontex, 2013, p. 20). Securitization is here moderate in both form and degree, with a sense of urgency brought about by the report’s invocation of a crisis discourse, which intensifies in the following years.

As predicted by the 2012 report, the 2013 report notes that the Eastern Mediterranean route accounted for the largest percentage of “illegal” border crossings in 2012, being the most used route since data collection began in 2008 and following a “remarkably seasonal pattern… peaking in the third quarter of each year” (Frontex, 2013, p. 22) – similar to the mass arrivals in 2015. The report attributes increased Greek patrols, Frontex operations, and collaboration with Turkish authorities as significantly reducing crossings, describing these measures as “resulting in only small displacements to alternative routes”, including the Greek-Turkish sea border (Frontex, 2013, pp. 22–23, emphasis added) – thus setting the pretext for the increased maritime arrivals and deaths in the years to come. The discursive practices of reproduction and inflation become more pronounced in the 2014 report, which warns of an impending crisis:

Looking ahead, everything points to a heightened likelihood of large numbers of illegal border crossings into the EU and an increased number of migrants in need of assistance from search and rescue operations but also in terms of provision of

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79 Even the Frontex officials themselves disagree on this, with the interviewee working in the Situation Centre at the time claiming that it could not have been foreseen, whereas his colleague working more closely with operational analysis said that they “saw it coming” (interviews 23/6/21, 15/7/21).

80 Düvell (2011, p. 293, emphasis added) points out that rather than limiting unwanted migration, “a significant (unintended) effect of limiting regular immigration and restricting employment is that migration is driven into informal, shadow… activities”.
international protection, in particular… on the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Central Mediterranean route. Many migrants who crossed illegally are expected to continue making secondary movements within the EU. (Frontex, 2014, p. 9, emphases added)

Here we also see a strong degree of interdiscursivity, with the report weaving together security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses into a securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, where refugees and migrants are not only an urgent ‘risk’ but also ‘at risk’ (Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Interdiscursivity refers to the borrowing of elements from another discourse (see Fairclough, 2015), which in this case refers to Frontex bringing in humanitarian concerns to its largely securitized crisis discourse. This discourse convergence will be discussed more in the last theme, but is also apparent in the report’s description of the main trends in the past year, which saw:

A large increase in illegal border-crossings by Syrians, subsequently applying for asylum, on the Eastern Mediterranean route and in the Central Mediterranean; a steady flow of migrants departing from North Africa… putting their life at risk to cross the Mediterranean Sea; and a sharp increase… in detections reported by Hungary at its land border with Serbia. (Frontex, 2014, p. 7, emphases added)

Here we see how refugees and migrants must both be stopped from crossing the border “illegally” but at the same time rescued at sea, with the report bringing in humanitarian logics. Securitization is banal here (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995), with the report consistently referring to Syrians as “illegal border-crossings” although most of them apply for asylum once they get to Europe. Apart from this discursive practice of obscuring, this excerpts also illustrates the discursive practice of inversion, with the report blaming refugees and migrants themselves for “putting their lives at risk” by crossing the Mediterranean – highlighting their ‘reckless’ behavior rather than Europe’s inaccessible asylum system.

The 2014 report further predicts the Mediterranean to remain a “hotspot” for irregularized migration; an increased workload for border control authorities due to more SAR operations; and the use of North African countries “as transit by migrants from many different origins, which complicate further predictions in terms of volume” (Frontex, 2014, pp. 63, 80, emphasis added). The report also

81 This points to a legal gap in the international protection regime, where the right to asylum is asserted without any provisions as to how refugees are to get to the territory of a state to make use of this right (see Shachar, 2020).
notes that increased surveillance on the Greek land border with Turkey has
displaced “flows” to the Eastern Aegean Sea and the Bulgarian land border, which it describes as putting “pressure on the limited local reception facilities” (Frontex, 2014, p. 63, emphasis added). Although securitization is banal here, its degree intensifies alongside the increased number of arrivals, with the report being concerned with the consequences for member states rather than refugees and migrants themselves.

There is also high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity in the wider field of European external(ized) border control. Intertextuality refers to how different texts draw on each other (Fairclough, 2015), and is illustrated by the 2015 report’s citing of the European Commission’s priorities for that year:

To tackle the growing pressure at our external borders the Commission is developing a European Agenda on Migration… with firm measures against irregular migration and people trafficking and smuggling. Improving the management of migration means better linking our migration policy with our external policy, fostering greater internal and external cooperation, based on responsibility and solidarity and preventing tragic events such as those recurrently happening in the Mediterranean. (European Commission, 2014, in Frontex, 2015, p. 42, emphases added)

The securitized humanitarian crisis discourse that Frontex invokes is evident here, with “firm measures” against smuggling and cooperation with third countries framed as both preventing unwanted migration and deaths at the borders. Highlighting the simultaneous risk and burden posed by refugees and migrants, the report notes that “the increasing complexity of irregular arrivals are expected to absorb significant resources”, with the broadening of the surveillance area in the Central Mediterranean (Frontex, 2015, p. 48, emphases added). It warns that the large number of arrivals through the Aegean Sea will “undermine systematic screening and debriefing activities”; lead to increased “secondary movements through the Western Balkans”; and that Syrians will remain the top country of origin for refugees and migrants coming to Europe due to the large number of displaced in the MENA region (Frontex, 2015, pp. 48, 6, emphasis added). While securitization’s form remains banal here, it further intensifies in

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82 This contradicts the 2013 report’s assertion that surveillance would only cause minor displacements to these routes, illustrating Europe’s role in creating “border-induced displacement” (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018).
degree, coming close to the Copenhagen School’s description of securitization as relating to “existential threats” (Buzan et al., 1998).

This illustrates that at the outset of 2015, Frontex’s risk analyses had largely predicted the mass arrivals that would come that summer. What should be surprising about the 2015 ‘crisis’ is thus not the unprecedented number of arrivals but EUropean policymakers’ unpreparedness, whom this information did not reach. Frontex’s predictions also question whether it was a crisis in the sense that it was partly foreseen.83 Frontex’s risk analyses were unable to estimate the scale of the arrivals and the lack of SAR operations, however, although they already documented the need. Frontex and EUrope’s lack of preventive measures to combat the anticipated border deaths illustrate the extent to which securitization is normalized in this field, which gears responses towards increased border controls rather than SAR.

During and after the 2015 ‘crisis’, Frontex’s risk analysis reports both reproduce and inflate it through its discursive practices and invocation of a securitized crisis discourse. While the form of securitization is banal, its degree becomes extreme. This is clear in the 2016 report, which cites a “never-before-seen figure” of more than 1.8 million detections of “illegal” border crossings in 2015, which is a six-fold increase from 2014 (Frontex, 2016, p. 6). The report notes that the year began with “extremely high levels for the month of January… and each subsequent month set a new monthly record” (Frontex, 2016, p. 6, emphases added). The situation at the external(ized) border is described as “out of control” in the Western Balkans, where buses and trains were requestioned by governments to transport refugees and migrants further into EUrope (Frontex, 2016, p. 6, emphasis added). Securitization is here both banal and explicit at the same time, being banal because the report does not refer to refugees and migrants as being a risk but merely implies it (cf. Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995), and explicit due the report’s portrayal of chaos at the borders as a result of the arrivals.

Moreover, Frontex exaggerates the ‘crisis’, with the report admitting that since there is no way of tracking refugees and migrants after they have crossed one section of the external border, there is a chance of double counting if the same person crosses another section of the border later on (see also Sigona, 2015). This illustrates the discursive practice of inflation, with the report estimating that due to this (double) counting practice, the 1.8 million crossings only relate to 1 million individuals, with many being counted twice since they crossed the border

83 Not to mention aggravated by EUrope’s restrictive migration policies and border controls (Andersson, 2016; Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2016), something which the reports never address.
first to Greece and later re-entered the EU from the Western Balkans (Frontex, 2016, p. 6). As predicted in the preceding reports, the majority of these came through the Eastern Mediterranean route, crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands; with Syrians and Afghans representing the highest share, although the report emphasizes that precise numbers are difficult to establish due to a suspected large number of false declarations of nationality (Frontex, 2016, p. 7) – inferring their deceitful behavior.84

The 2016 report describes the spike in arrivals as posing challenges not just for Greece and Italy but all member states since many lack proper reception facilities and expertise in document security and age assessment – portraying refugees and migrants as both a burden and a risk. Banal securitization is further illustrated by the report’s call for more thorough screening and registration processes at the external border, with systematic registration of refugees and migrants’ fingerprints in the Eurodac database. This is emphasized as important to protect internal security, with the report referring to the 2015 Paris attacks where two of the terrorists had entered Greece “illegally” and used fraudulent Syrian documents. Here securitization is explicit, with the report linking migration with terrorism. This is further illustrated by the report’s emphasis on the lack of penalties for false declarations of nationality, which entails “a risk that some persons representing a security threat to the EU may be taking advantage of this situation” (Frontex, 2016, p. 7, emphases added). Being at its most explicit so far, securitization here fits the Copenhagen School’s understanding of it as dealing with extraordinary circumstances (Buzan et al., 1998).

By drawing on the discursive practice of reproduction and the crisis discourse, the “situational picture” chapter declares that the “unprecedented number of detections of illegal border-crossing… reveal… a migration crisis without equivalent in Europe since World War II” (Frontex, 2016, p. 14, emphases added). The report’s reference to it as a “migration crisis” rather than a ‘refugee crisis’ glosses over the fact that many applied for asylum, illustrating the discursive practice of obscuring. The report further perpetuates the securitized crisis discourse, describing “chaotic scenes at the external borders in September 2015, when migrants forced their way through the border and onboard trains and buses” (Frontex, 2016, p. 32, emphases added). It underlines that several member

84 This is not the reality that I encountered during my fieldwork on Lesvos, where none of the camp residents that I spoke with had a good understanding of how the asylum process works, how long it takes, or who gets protection. On the contrary, Greek and European asylum policies seemed to be a black box for them, with it being arbitrary who got to “get a passport” or “go to Athens” (and get off the island).
states reintroduced temporary border controls after this in order to restrain “the chaos at the borders” (Frontex, 2016, p. 32, emphasis added). Here securitization reaches the spectacular (Buzan et al., 1998), with words such as “unprecedented”, “crisis”, and “chaos” being used to describe the scenes at the external(ized) border.85

Illustrating what Lember-Pedersen (2019) calls “border-induced displacement”, the report notes that Hungary’s declaration of Serbia as a “safe third country”, return of asylum-seekers there, and erection of a border fence displaced refugees and migrants to alternative routes. Similarly, the report cites an unusually high number of asylum applications at the Norwegian border with Russia, which only eased in December when Russia “resumed its practice of preventing the exit of travellers without a travel document that would allow them to enter the EU” (Frontex, 2016, pp. 6–7, emphasis added). Although constituting de facto pullbacks, the report is more concerned with a possible “displacement effect” to Finland, which saw increased crossings shortly after (Frontex, 2016, p. 7).86 Here securitization is back to being banal, accompanied by the discursive practice of obscuring. This is illustrated by the fact that the so-called “Arctic route” is neither a case of “illegal” border crossing or clandestine entry, since the refugees and migrants crossed at an official border crossing point (Storskog), presenting their asylum applications to the Norwegian border guards.87 This distinguishes this route from most other migration routes to Europe, although the report makes no mention of this. This sub-section has thus demonstrated that far from only reporting about the 2015 ‘crisis’, Frontex’s risk analysis reports discursively reproduce and inflate it, portraying it as a ‘security crisis’ rather than a humanitarian one.

85 This resembles De Genova’s (2002, 2013a) “border spectacle”, which is brought about by states’ own border patrols rather than refugees and migrants, however.

86 As Düvell (2011, p. 294, emphases added) points out, “a considerable discrepancy can be identified between policy goals, the reduction of immigration, and policy outcomes, the creation of irregular immigration”.

87 The people crossed by bike in the winter, since the border agreement between Norway and Russia prohibits pedestrian traffic and drivers will be fined if carrying passengers without the proper documents. This illustrates how states can dictate territory to not only be traversed at a certain point and time but also by certain means, which in this case excludes anyone who cannot ride a bike from applying for asylum at this border section. However, it also demonstrates refugees and migrants’ ability to adapt to states’ bordering techniques.
The Covid19 Pandemic: The Fourth ‘Crisis’

Whereas securitization slightly abates in the reports following the 2015 ‘crisis’ (see below), it regains speed with the Covid19 pandemic. With its outbreak in EUrope in early 2020, the pandemic amplifies the crisis discourse even more so than any previous crisis in Frontex’s border knowledge. This is evident in the 2020 report, which warns that the corona virus might cause “the outbreak of internal and inter-state conflict” if developing countries are unable to provide their citizens with healthcare, economic support, or “to maintain order… potentially creating new displaced populations or irregular migration… moving towards Europe” (Frontex, 2020, p. 57, emphases added). In addition to posing a ‘security risk’, refugees and migrants are here portrayed as a ‘biopolitical risk’ as well, with the report stressing that “infected people from developing countries might seek medical care in Europe – regardless of the risk of infecting others” (Frontex, 2020, p. 57, emphasis added).88 Despite EUrope being the epicenter of the pandemic at the time, refugees and migrants are securitized due to the ostensible ‘health risk’ that they now pose to EUropean populations. Securitization oscillates to the explicit here, with the Covid19 pandemic described as an emergency which requires exceptional measures (cf. Buzan et al., 1998).

Published a year after the outbreak, securitization intensifies even more in the 2021 report, which proclaims that “every aspect of European integrated border management in 2020 was dominated by the COVID-19 crisis” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 8, emphases added). Exaggerating the crisis, the report emphasizes that although “passenger flows” at the external border dropped by more than two-thirds compared to 2019, irregularized migration only decreased by 12% – demonstrating “the necessity to remain vigilant” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 8, emphasis added). Drawing on the discursive practice of inflation, the report stresses the pandemic’s consequences for EUropean external(ized) border control, including: staff shortage among border and coast guard authorities due to quarantine measures; more complex procedures at the border with the introduction of health checks; and “nationality-specific pull factors due to the ceasing of readmissions” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 8, emphasis added). Securitization is here both explicit and intense, with the 2021 report underlining that:

88 See Wodak (2020, p. 236) for right-wing populist parties’ comparisons of foreigners to “pathogens”, or Tazzioli and Stierl (2021, p. 539) for the framing of migrants as “vehicles of contagion”.
Not a single aspect was untouched by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on movements, border closures and other far-reaching COVID-19 countermeasures impacted all categories of cross-border movements, be it tourism, business travel or irregular migration. One threat (that to public health) shaped all other threats as every associated chapter will attest to. (Frontex, 2021i, p. 10, emphases added)

Drawing on the discursive practice of reproduction, the report contends that Covid19 “profoundly impacted migration management” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 10, emphasis added), with many member states partially suspending asylum services (e.g., Greece) and relying on remote interviews. Rather than discussing the fundamental rights implications of this, the report discursively inflates the crisis by underscoring that although the number of refusals of entry diminished with decreased passenger flows, refusals based on health grounds increased sixfold – although this mostly concerned regular travel (Frontex, 2021i, p. 17). Similarly, the report emphasizes border guards’ heavy workload despite reduced passenger flows, since regular checks were re-focused from the external borders to the internal borders instead (Frontex, 2021i, p. 44). It postulates that Covid19 will “continue to significantly affect European integrated border management for much of 2021”, “as the lifting of one country’s restrictions may result in an immediate, significant resumption of migrant smuggling” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 46, emphases added). Here we see not the external(ized) border being the “referent object” (Buzan et al., 1998) of security threats but border control as such.

The report further fuels the crisis discourse by forecasting that “critical health risks in countries of origin will hamper returns, acting as an additional pull factor”, as well as warning of the use of false vaccination certificates (Frontex, 2021i, p. 47, emphasis added). This bleak outlook is compounded by the report’s assessment that economic downturn, increasing social inequalities, and “megatrends” such as demographic imbalance, resource scarcity, and climate change “might act as a strong push factor for international migration” and cross-border crime (Frontex, 2021i, pp. 47, 8, emphasis added) – explicitly securitizing migration by linking it with crime.

The Ebbing and Flowing of Crises

This sub-theme illustrates how Frontex normalizes crises after the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ by portraying the situation at the external(ized) border as in a state of perpetual crisis despite the declining number of arrivals. Although 2015 saw by far the highest number of irregularized arrivals in the period 2010–2021,
the reports continue to invoke a crisis in the wake of the 2015 ‘crisis’ – illustrating the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, with the later reports building on the earlier ones’ invocation of a crisis discourse in order to maintain an image of a persistent crisis at the borders. The crisis discourse thus becomes increasingly normalized as Frontex advocates for a constant preparedness at the external(ized) border in the face of possible future crises (see also Perkowski et al., 2023, “protracted crisis”), with the notion of crisis being stripped of content as it comes to mean everything and nothing at the same time – or whatever Frontex wants it to mean (see DeBono, 2019, for hospitality as an empty signifier; or Hellström, 2006, for security as a floating signifier). The discursive practice of inversion is key here, with Frontex inverting crisis by portraying it as normal rather than exceptional, and as such justifying increased border controls and a larger role for its border knowledge in the face of perpetual crisis (see Campesi, 2014).

The normalized crisis discourse first appears in the 2017 report’s preface, with the Executive Director proclaiming that 2016 was another year of “intense migratory pressure”, despite “illegal” border crossings falling by more than a third (Frontex, 2017, p. 6, emphasis added). Although the total number of arrivals is lower, the report relocates the crisis to the Central Mediterranean route, highlighting that Italy saw “the highest number of arrivals ever recorded” (Frontex, 2017, p. 6, emphasis added). It is therefore not time to lower the shoulders, with the report also warning that “a large number of poorly documented migrants moving within Europe continues to constitute a threat to Europe’s internal security” (Frontex, 2017, p. 6, emphases added). Here securitization is explicit (cf. Buzan et al., 1998), with the report referring to refugees and migrants as a ‘security threat’. The report further cautions that although arrivals have decreased compared to 2015, the numbers remain “exceptionally high”, putting continued “pressure” on the external border (Frontex, 2017, p. 18). By drawing on the discursive practice of inversion, Frontex thus normalizes crisis by advocating for constant vigilance despite the reduction in arrivals (see Perkowski et al.’s, 2023, “protracted crisis”).

This becomes even clearer in the 2018 report, with the preface by the Executive Director warning that despite the “significant fall” in “illegal” border crossings in 2017 – from 511,000 in 2016 to 204,000 (a 60% decrease) – “the overall pressure on Europe’s external borders remained… high”, highlighting that the

89 The decrease is attributed to the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, which facilitated the return of irregularized migrants from Greece to Turkey, and the closing down of the Balkan route (European Council, 2016).
Western Mediterranean route saw the highest number of crossings since 2009 (Frontex, 2018b, pp. 6, 43, emphasis added).\textsuperscript{90} Although the statistics show declining numbers across all FRAN indicators, with detections of “illegal” border crossings dropping to its lowest since 2013,\textsuperscript{91} the report underlines border authorities’ heavy workload, being “increasingly engaged in search and rescue operations covering vast areas of the Mediterranean Sea” (Frontex, 2018b, pp. 16, 9, emphasis added). The report urges that the decline in crossings “should not distract from the fact that the aggregate exceeds any total reported… before… 2014, an indicator that the migratory pressure on the EU’s external borders remained very high” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 18, emphases added). The discursive practice of inversion thus allows Frontex to continue to invoke a crisis at the external(ized) border despite the declining number of arrivals, illustrating its normalization of crisis. The report cites the increasing number of refugees worldwide as an indication of proliferating crises, highlighting that:

\begin{quote}
A great number of people are being displaced. According to UNHCR, in 2016, 65.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide. Most of them are from and stay in developing countries, and only a fraction decide to move to the EU. Yet, this small number may have sizeable impact on the EU’s borders and their management. The size and composition of the flows are inherent to the development of crises, hence the importance of obtaining information from a wide range of countries and sources, developing capabilities to monitor the flows and understanding their drivers. (Frontex, 2018b, p. 39, emphases added)
\end{quote}

Here securitization’s form is banal but its degree intense due to the strong wording and reference to UNHCR’s numbers on refugees in order to substantiate the scale of the ‘threat’ that they pose to the external(ized) border. The quote illustrates that Frontex regards these as opportunistic migrants rather than genuine refugees, underlining that the “composition” of the flows is inherent to the emergence of “crises” – deeming some more ‘risky’ than others. The discursive practice of inflation is also evident here, with the report exaggerating the threat posed by refugees and migrants by stressing that even the very few who come to Europe might “have a sizeable impact”, which is presumed to be negative. Similarly, the 2019 report asserts that:

\textsuperscript{90} Although this only accounted for 11% of the EU total.
\textsuperscript{91} This includes the Western Balkans, which saw a 91% decrease from 2016 to 2017 (from 130,000 to 12,000); the Eastern Mediterranean, with a 77% decrease (from 182,000 to 42,000); and the Central Mediterranean, with a 34% decrease (from 181,000 to 118,000) (Frontex, 2018b, p. 43).
As displacement due to... conflict and persecution is rising and the wealth gap between Europe and the Global South persists, it is likely that integrated European border management will continue to be tested in the future (Frontex, 2019b, p. 38, emphases added).

Here again not only migrants are securitized but refugees as well, with the report calling for more border controls in response to poverty and displacement. The normalization of crisis continues in this report, which includes a section titled “from crisis response to preparedness: changing priorities in Member States’ migration policy” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 3, emphasis added), which describes how member states are shifting away from the emergency measures introduced during the 2015 ‘crisis’ to more permanent ones. Despite the declining numbers of arrivals for the third consecutive year, the preface by the Executive Director underlines that Frontex “maintains a strong presence at Europe’s external borders”, running “three permanent operations in Spain, Greece and Italy, assisting EU Member States that faced the highest migratory pressure” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 6, emphases added). He highlights that Frontex deploys 1500 border guards at all times, in addition to “vessels, planes, helicopters, patrol cars and other equipment”, monitoring “Europe’s borders 24 hours a day, seven days a week” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 6, emphasis added). Frontex’s normalization of crisis thus explicitly securitizes migration by treating it as an issue that must be urgently dealt with (cf. Buzan et al., 1998).

Figure 10: Frontex’s overview of “illegal” border crossings, 2015–18 (Frontex, 2019, p. 41).
This is further illustrated by the report’s emphasis that “secondary movements continued on a large scale during 2018”, as well as its description of the increased detections of clandestine entry as “testimony to a persistency in migratory pressure” (Frontex, 2019b, pp. 18–19, 8, emphases added). The discursive practice of obscuring is evident here, with the report downplaying that the number of clandestine entries remain low in absolute terms, only increasing from 1600 in 2017 to 2200 in 2018 – which is a fraction of the total number of irregularized border crossings, not to mention regular ones. Out of these, Afghans – one of the top three nationalities of asylum-seekers in 2018 – accounted for 46% of the detections, which means that a large part of these were de facto asylum-seekers.

The normalization of crisis in the wider field of EUropean external(ized) border control is further illustrated by member states shifting “their priorities and allocation of resources, from reception services and asylum to a greater focus on border control, secondary movements and returns” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 36, emphasis added).

According to the 2019 report, this includes “the recruitment… of new border guards… the allocation of larger financial resources, the construction… of infrastructure… and the reinforcement of technical equipment”; along with “wide-ranging cooperation with third countries”, involving secondments and training of border guards, information sharing, and coordinated border patrols (Frontex, 2019b, p. 36, emphases added). Instead of focusing on integration and processing the backlog of asylum applications, this shows that member states remain in crisis mode, preparing for the next crisis – which Frontex’s border knowledge suggests is a question of ‘when’ rather than an ‘if’. Frontex’s normalization of crisis continues in the 2020 report, with the Executive Director’s foreword focusing on increases in refusals of entry and “illegal” stay, Turkish “hybrid threats”, and the “effects of pandemics and migrants organizing themselves or being used to challenge border regimes” (Frontex, 2020, pp. 6–7, emphasis added). The discursive practices of obscuring and inversion are both evident here, where in the context of a 92% decrease in arrivals compared to 2015, the report suggests that:

It is instructive to go back further in the data collection… [T]he number of detections in 2019 is roughly comparable to the figure for 2011, when strong migratory pressure was exerted on the EU’s south-eastern land borders and also in the Central Mediterranean. (Frontex, 2020, p. 22, emphases added)
The inversion of crisis is thus key to its normalization, allowing Frontex to explain away declining figures by conveying an image of a continuous state of exception at the external(ized) border which necessitates constant vigilance. Apart from securitizing migration by treating it as synonymous with risk, this outlook “forecloses alternative ways of… imagining migration” (Perkowski et al., 2023, p. 114, emphasis added), thus normalizing securitization. The report further fuels the crisis discourse, forecasting increased irregularized migration due to tensions in “key regions of origin” and EUrope’s neighborhood; along with people organizing themselves “to challenge border regimes”, with “the goal of overwhelming border authorities or even forcing their way onto EU territory” (Frontex, 2020, p. 56, emphases added). It emphasizes that geopolitics in the Mediterranean may result in the “threat of the use of migration as a bargaining chip” (Frontex, 2020, p. 57, emphasis added), blaming third countries for instrumentalizing migrants without acknowledging EUrope’s corresponding pursuits in its external policies.

Frontex’s normalization of crisis intensifies with the Covid-19 pandemic, with the foreword by the Executive Director describing it as a “once-in-a-lifetime global crisis that has affected every aspect of our lives” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 6, emphases added). Despite the unprecedented drop in both regular and ‘irregular’ border crossings, the report instrumentalizes the pandemic to show how border control not only protects EUrope from ‘migratory crises’ but ‘health crises’ as well, underscoring that:

If 2020 has demonstrated anything, then it is this: serious situations affecting border control can occur at any time, suddenly and without any obvious warning signs. The pandemic has once again shown how important preparation, contingency planning, cooperation and crisis management are. (Frontex, 2021i, p. 9, emphases added)

Similarly, the report notes that despite “historically low” numbers on the Eastern Mediterranean route, Frontex launched two rapid border interventions to Greece in response to “strong pressure” in the first quarter of the year (Frontex, 2021i, p. 15). This sub-theme has thus demonstrated how Frontex’s border knowledge normalizes crisis by drawing on the discursive practices of inversion and obscuring (see Krzyzanowski et al., 2023, for crisis as an imaginary). This means that the reports illustrate a high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015), extending the 2015 ‘crisis’ into subsequent reports. As Perkowski et al. (2023, p. 113, emphases added) point out:
The supposed dichotomies between crisis and non-crisis, crisis and routine, or crisis and normality have become eroded, so that speaking of states of routine becoming disrupted by moments of crisis appears nonsensical.

This larger theme has illustrated how Frontex not merely monitors crises at the external(ized) border but discursively reproduce, inflate, and invert them – which contributes to their normalization. Crises are thus productive since they not only add a sense of urgency but justify increased border controls in response to perpetual crises at the border (see also Campesi, 2022), “decreas[ing] space for alternative interpretations of increased migrant arrivals” (Perkowski et al., 2023, p. 117, emphasis) and as such normalizing securitization in this field.

**Frontex’s Construction of Humanitarianism**

The last cluster of themes illustrates how Frontex rationalizes a securitized response to irregularized migration by drawing on a humanitarian discourse which justifies increased border controls in response to suffering and deaths at the borders (see also Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Campesi, 2022; Horsti, 2012). This illustrates the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, which draw on a humanitarian discourse that contributes to normalizing securitization in this field.

**Inverted Humanitarian Border Control**

The next to last theme illustrates Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control, with the reports drawing on a humanitarian discourse to portray some refugees and migrants as more deserving and vulnerable than others and non-rescue as saving lives. The discursive practice of inversion is key in this theme, with Frontex inverting humanitarianism by framing border control as for refugees and migrants’ own good (see also Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Williams, 2016), which works to legitimize securitization. Securitization takes on a banal form in this theme, which bears resemblance to the inverted looking-glass world, where dry biscuits are thirst-quenching (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 143).

**Constructing Hierarchies of Deservingness and Vulnerability**

The first sub-theme refers to Frontex’s construction of hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability, with the reports drawing on a humanitarian discourse in portraying women and children as more vulnerable than young men (see also Sachseder et al., 2022; Williams, 2016) and some nationalities as more
deserving than others. Frontex’s distinction between ‘genuine refugees’ and ‘economic migrants’ is enabled by the discursive practices of construction and obscuring, with the reports casting refugees and migrants as either deserving/undeserving of protection or vulnerable/risky (see also Aradau, 2004; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018; and Pallister-Wilkins, 2017) – which banally securitizes those found ‘unworthy’. Through these arbitrary hierarchies, Frontex thus informs European policymakers not only who is vulnerable but also who is not and thus a potential risk. As we will see, however, a discursive shift takes places in the more recent reports, where children become increasingly securitized as well.

The construction of deservingness is present already in the 2012 report, which emphasizes that only a quarter of Tunisians detected “illegally” crossing the external border applied for asylum, describing this movement as “mostly economically-driven” (Frontex, 2012, p. 16, emphasis added) and Tunisians by implication as undeserving. The report also questions the protection need of irregularized migrants from Pakistan, underlining that “intelligence suggests that most Pakistani migrants are young male and previously unemployed economic migrants” (Frontex, 2012, p. 18, emphases added). This illustrates Frontex’s aged and gendered perceptions of deservingness, with the reports banally securitizing young men by portraying them as not in need of protection. This is also clear in the report’s reference to debriefing interviews with refugees and migrants, which suggest that more than 60% of Afghans apprehended in Greece had previously resided in Iran as refugees (Frontex, 2012, p. 18). While this should strengthen the credibility of their protection needs, Frontex’s suggestion is the opposite: that there is no reason for them to come to Europe if they were already residing in a ‘safe’ third country.93

Frontex’s treatment of nationality as a determinant of deservingness is evident in the 2013 report, which has detailed sections on the “top nationalities” detected on each route, painting a picture of the ‘irregular migrant’ as a black, young, single, low-skilled, unemployed, and economically-motivated male (Frontex,

92 See Borrelli (2022) for how suspicion is key in street-level bureaucrats’ making of (un)deservingness.

93 This presumption is based on a flawed understanding of transit migration and migratory journeys, which often span years if not decades, especially for Afghans living in exile (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018).
2013, pp. 25–26). The report draws on debriefing interviews to maintain this image, although this data is for intelligence purposes and is not statistically representative (interview 15/7/21) – thus portraying a skewed image of who is trying to get to EUrope and why. Here the discursive practice of obscuring enables the banal securitization of this group, by portraying them as undeserving. Similarly, the report highlights the discrepancy between Syrian refugee “flows” into neighboring countries and EUrope, with the former being composed of 75% women and children and the latter 74% young Syrian males crossing the border “illegally” from Turkey to Greece (Frontex, 2013, p. 26) – casting doubt over the latter’s protection needs while ignoring the gendered and aged risks of international migration. This is a banal form of securitization, with young men’s juxtaposition with women and children allowing their construction as ‘a risk’ rather than ‘at risk’.

Gender and age-related data are also key in Frontex’s attempts to humanitarainize its risk analyses (cf. Fairclough’s, 2015, “re-contextualization”), with the 2019 report underlining that the inclusion of these indicators:

Marks an important step for EU border management by allowing the Agency to compile more comprehensive and tailored risk assessments, effectively identify vulnerable groups and target its operational responses. (Frontex, 2019b, p. 30, emphases added)

The report maintains that this disaggregation of data is “instrumental in determining vulnerabilities, as well as sex and age-specific protection needs” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 30, emphases added), thus producing a gendered and aged hierarchy of vulnerability. However, a discursive shift (Fairclough, 2015) takes place in the more recent reports, which construct children and unaccompanied minors as both vulnerable and risky, banally securitizing them on par with adults. This can be seen in the 2019 report, which includes a separate section on “children in migration” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 30), whereas previous reports dealt with children under the section about human trafficking. Replacing the humanitarian discourse with a securitized one, the report refers to children interchangeably as

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94 See Achiume (2022, p. 445, emphasis added) for how “the default of liberal borders is racialized inclusion and exclusion that privileges ‘Whiteness’”, making “international migration governance… a form of racial governance”.

95 See the European Data Protection Supervisor’s concern regarding the low data quality and reliability of these interviews and their subsequent “implications for certain groups who may be unduly targeted or represented in the output of risk analysis products” (Vasquez, 2023, para. 4).
“child arrivals”, “illegal border-crossings by children”, and “clandestine entries by children” (Frontex, 2019b, pp. 32–33). Banal securitization is also enabled by the discursive practice of obscuring, with the report emphasizing the challenges that the increased number of children present for border guards in conducting reliable age assessments rather than focusing on their special needs – treating them with a similar suspicion as adults.

The banal securitization of child migration is facilitated by the co-optation of a humanitarian discourse (cf. Fairclough, 2015), with the report warning that “the different reception conditions and prospects for integration across Member States act as catalysts for secondary movements of children, which create further protection challenges – by exposing them to the risk of trafficking… and exploitation” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 33, emphases added). By invoking a humanitarian discourse, Frontex here expands the scope of securitization by portraying immobility as in children’s best interest. Presenting border control as humanitarian, the report contends that “in order to guarantee their protection, it is vital that children are prioritized in all border-related procedures”, emphasizing that Frontex is “committed to ensuring the respect and protection of the rights of children on the move” (Frontex, 2019b, p. 33, emphasis added).

This sub-theme has thus demonstrated how Frontex’s border knowledge discursively constructs hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability by using gender, age, and nationality as indicators of protection need, with racialized young men constructed as undeserving and women and children in need of help (see also Sachseder et al., 2022; Williams, 2016). This presentation of the data prescribes security interventions for the former and humanitarian ones for the latter, banally securitizing most irregularized migration to Europe. The sub-theme also illustrates the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, with the humanitarian discourse being “a by-product” of securitization, “play[ing] the game of differentiating between genuine asylum-seekers and illegal migrants, helping the first by condemning the second and justifying border controls” (Bigo, 2002, p. 79). This “categorical fetishism” (Crawley & Skleparis 2018) illustrates Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control, which ignores the classical humanitarian principles of equality and non-discrimination (Nascimento, 2015; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015).

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96 Compare with what Aradou (2004, p. 251) calls the “schizophrenic discourse” of trafficked women being described as both a “victim” and an “illegal migrant”, since they often enter Europe not knowing their fate.

97 As Hellström (2006, p. 174, emphasis added) notes, “identity politics is about the power of categorization; of imposing labels that separate groups of people from each other”.

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Non-Rescue as Humanitarian

The second sub-theme illustrates a key characteristic of Frontex’s border knowledge, which is various processes of inversion. By drawing on the discursive practices of inversion and obscuring, the risk analysis reports invert both blame and humanitarianism by portraying smugglers and refugees and migrants themselves as responsible for suffering and deaths at the external(ized) border rather than restrictive border controls, which are framed as humanitarian. The most prominent of these inversions, also in this wider field, is that of non-rescue being humanitarian. This is enabled by the reports’ portrayal of SAR as a double-edged sword: saving lives at sea but at the same time incentivizing more people to attempt dangerous crossings. This discursive inversion allows Frontex to advocate for more border controls in response to irregularized migration and deaths at the external(ized) border but less SAR, since it leads to deaths at sea. As we will see, securitization is hardly noticeable in this sub-theme due to its humanitarian wrapping, which makes it as invisible as Billig’s (1995) many “unwaved flags” of nationalism.

The framing of SAR as a pull-factor is most pronounced following the 2015 ‘crisis’, with the 2016 report including a section on ‘preventing casualties at the border’ (Frontex, 2016, p. 46, emphasis added), which blames smugglers for embarking on “a large number of simultaneous departures” from Libya, which “makes rapid interventions to all distress calls impossible” (Frontex, 2016, p. 46, emphases added). Illustrating the limited scope of humanitarian border control, the report emphasizes that “due to a limited number of assets, some have to be given priority, putting the lives of others at risk”, while contending that “the increased number of vessels engaged in rescue operations is not necessarily a guarantee for a reduction in the number of fatalities” (Frontex, 2016, p. 46, emphases added). Here the discursive practice of inversion is apparent, with the report blaming border deaths on smugglers rather than limited SAR capacities. The discursive practice of obscuring is also present, with Frontex portraying these deaths as unavoidable, obscuring the political decisions that took place during this time to shift the operational areas of Triton and EUNAVFOR MED away from where most distress cases take place (Forensic Architecture, 2016; interviews 9/12/20, 23/6/21).

The report also does not mention Frontex’s lack of collaboration with SAR NGOs in the Mediterranean or member states’ criminalization of them, with

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98 This sentiment was shared by the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials, which will be explored in the next chapter.
refusals of disembarkation, detention of ships, and prosecution of crew for human smuggling becoming increasingly common among southern member states (interview 7/5/20; CoE, 2023a; Mainwaring & DeBono, 2022; Lawlor, 2023). Instead, Frontex’s solution to these deaths is more border controls, with the 2016 report describing the externalization of border controls to Mauritania and Senegal as saving ‘several thousand lives’ by preventing departures to the Canary Islands (Frontex, 2016, p. 47, emphasis added) – thus banally securitizing migration. The report further notes smugglers’ use of “frail, overcrowded boats, with limited fuel supply to maximize their profits, putting migrants’ lives at considerable risk”, while asserting that rather than saving lives, SAR operations “contributed to the enrichment of smugglers who could cut on travel costs and advertised to susceptible migrants that rescue operations make the journey safer, thus increasing the demand for crossings” (Frontex, 2016, p. 20, emphases added).

By drawing on the discursive practice of inversion, Frontex here portrays SAR as counterproductive, which rationalizes non-rescue since that would save more lives in the long-term by deterring sea crossings. This inverted humanitarian logic is also discernible in the report’s many contradictions. For instance, it warns that “crossing the border illegally between BCPs is the modus operandi representing the highest risk for migrants’ lives”, before calling for “strengthened measures at the border itself and more thorough checks of vehicles” to prevent clandestine entry (Frontex, 2016, p. 47, emphases added). The report does not consider that this might cause routes to shift to between BCPs instead, where the mortality rates are higher (see Andersson, 2016, for “displacement effects”; or De Haas et al., 2020, for “substitution effects”). This illustrates the perverse effects of inverted humanitarian border control, where people’s lives are further put at risk rather than saved, due to the risk that they are perceived to pose themselves.

The discursive practice of inversion is also evident in the 2017 report, which proclaims that “agency-deployed vessels rescued 90,000 migrants” in 2016 (Frontex, 2017, p. 6, emphasis added), although not clarifying whether this number includes both interceptions and SAR cases, which potentially inflates this number by treating interceptions as rescues. The portrayal of SAR as a double-edged sword continues in this report, which notes that numbers of deaths

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99 In contrast, the Portuguese navy officer and the Swedish coast guards remarked the important work carried out by SAR NGOs and called for a closer collaboration with them (interviews 9/12/20, 2/3/21, 17/3/21).

100 As Düvell (2011, p. 293, emphasis added) points out, “despite the political intention of preventing and reducing irregular migration various legislations instead contribute to its emergence”.

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increased in the Mediterranean in 2016 “despite enhanced operational efforts and the fact that most rescue operations took place close to... Libyan territorial waters” (Frontex, 2017, p. 8, emphasis added). Traditional border patrol is framed as more effective, with the report pointing out that on the Atlantic route “the low number of departures resulted in relatively few casualties” due to cooperation with West African states (Frontex, 2017, p. 20, emphases added). Outsourcing border controls is thus suggested as “one of the best ways to prevent a future migratory crisis in the Central Mediterranean” (Frontex, 2017, p. 33, emphases added), illustrating Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control. This parallels Australia’s “stop the boats” logic (Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017), with the rationale being that preventing people from getting on the boats saves lives, regardless of why people resort to these in the first place.

Frontex’s discursive inversion of SAR extends to the activities of SAR NGOs in the Mediterranean as well, with the 2017 report underlining that “a significant number of boats were intercepted or rescued [by them]... without any prior distress call and without official information as to the rescue location” (Frontex, 2017, p. 32, emphases added) – suggesting that these were unnecessary rescues which took place in Libya’s territorial waters and should have been disembarked there rather than in Europe. It further implies that the NGOs acted as a pull-factor, stressing that while their assets nearly doubled compared to 2015, “in parallel, the overall number of incidents increased dramatically” (Frontex, 2017, p. 32, emphasis added). Drawing on the discursive practice of inversion, the report asserts that smugglers turn “humanitarian assistance efforts... into a distinct tactical advantage”, which according to it means that “all parties involved in SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean unintentionally help criminals achieve their objectives” (Frontex, 2017, p. 32, emphases added). By arguing that “dangerous crossings on unseaworthy and overloaded vessels were organized with the main purpose of being detected by EUNAVFOR Med/Frontex and NGO vessels” (Frontex, 2017, p. 32, emphases added), Frontex is able to portray less SAR operations as the most humanitarian response to irregularized migration and deaths at the external(ized) border. The fact that Frontex (mis)recognizes the unintended consequences of SAR operations but not border controls – which is the reason why refugees and migrants take to smugglers’ boats to begin with – is another sign of securitization’s normalization in this field, where SAR becomes redundant but not border controls.

101 It also illustrates the “framing of Europe’s pre-frontier spaces as both the origin of and the solution to crisis” (Perkowski et al., 2023, p. 121, emphases added).
The pull-factor hypothesis underpinning the inversion of SAR is paradoxically contradicted by Frontex’s own debriefing interviews, which show that only a minority of refugees and migrants considered the presence of a Frontex operation to impact their route choice, rather being influenced by the availability of smugglers and the price (Frontex, 2017, p. 37). The evidence-base for the causality between SAR and irregularized migration is thus weak and not backed by research (Cusumano & Villa, 2019; Rodríguez Sánchez et al., 2023). The 2020 report also inverts blame, warning that “it has become more common for boats to reach the EU without the presence of a smuggler” (Frontex, 2020, p. 22, emphasis added), which makes the crossing more dangerous. Implying that smugglers are becoming more unscrupulous in their attempts to make a profit, the report does not mention that this “modus operandi” is partly a consequence of Europe’s fight against smugglers, which has made migrant journeys more treacherous as smugglers need to come up with new ways to avoid detection (Andersson, 2016; Cuttitta, 2019); that those who take over to steer the boats to safety are frequently charged with smuggling upon arrival in Italy, Malta, or Greece (see DeBono & Mainwaring, 2022, for the case of El Hiblu 3); or that Frontex’s own data shows that the majority of detected smugglers are EU nationals (Frontex 2010, 2013, 2014).

This is a clear case of the discursive practice of obscuring, with Frontex treating refugees and migrants both as “mute victims” (Malkki, 1996, p. 78) and unruly intruders with the same ruthless attitude as their smugglers, only to be tamed by good-willed border guards. This simultaneous victimization and banal securitization of refugees and migrants is facilitated by the vilification of smugglers, with the report emphasizing that:

Organised crime groups… business model is largely founded on the exploitation of migrants’ aspirations for a brighter future in a new country, and often conducted without any regard for the lives of those they are meant to be assisting. (Frontex, 2020, p. 55, emphases added)

Frontex’s construction of villainous smugglers thus serves as a smoke screen for Europe’s similar disregard for refugees and migrants’ lives, as evidenced by the portrayal of non-rescue as humanitarian. As Little and Vaughan-Williams

102 Wodak (2020) similarly identifies the “victim-perpetrator reversal” as a common discursive strategy to frame Jews and migrants as responsible for their own suffering.
argue in terms of the EU’s response to the 2015 ‘crisis’:

The *re-problematisation* of the problem as being essentially one of criminality – rather than as an outcome of repressive border security and migration policy and longer-term structural inequalities – depoliticises the broader political context in which the crisis can be located and understood.

This sub-theme has thus demonstrated the role of inversions in Frontex’s border knowledge, which blames smugglers, refugees, and migrants for their own deaths rather than EUrope’s inaccessible borders; along with portraying *not* saving lives at sea as the most humanitarian response. Evident among the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials as well, these inversions displace accountability from EUrope’s border regime and legitimize even more controls in response to irregularized migration – which in turn normalizes securitization. Securitization’s form has been the most banal in this wider theme than any other, being only noticeable in the inspiration it provides for ranking refugees and migrants’ deservingness and vulnerability and providing an elaborate excuse for not conducting rescue.

**Securitized Humanitarian Crisis Discourse**

The last theme concerns Frontex’s *securitized humanitarian crisis discourse*, which emerges with the 2015 ‘crisis’. It is a composite discourse, which illustrates the convergence of security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses (see Fairclough, 2015, “interdiscursivity”) in the reports. This discourse is used to describe refugees and migrants as both ‘at risk’ and ‘a risk’ to EUrope, illustrating the “care and control duality” in the reports and its contradictory logics (see Cusumano, 2019; Cuttitta, 2014). This discourse demonstrates both a discursive inversion and discourse co-optation, where Frontex sanitizes border control by incorporating humanitarian elements into its securitized crisis discourse (Andersson, 2017b; Cuttitta, 2014; Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Williams, 2016). Securitization is mostly explicit in this theme, with the reports portraying
an image of risk, death, and chaos at the borders,\textsuperscript{103} while at the same time normalizing securitization by justifying increased border controls in response.\textsuperscript{104}

Frontex’s mixing of a security and humanitarian discourse is illustrated by the way that the 2014 report frames Syrians as both ‘deserving’ and ‘devious’, describing them as accounting for a high share of “illegal” border crossings and asylum applications. The report draws on a humanitarian crisis discourse in explaining this increase as “reflecting the dire situation in Syria and the desperate plight of Syrian refugees”, while at the same time noting that Syrians are “the most commonly detected document fraudsters in the EU” (Frontex, 2014, pp. 7–8, 29, emphases added) – thus describing them both as ‘irregular migrants’ and de facto ‘refugees’. Similarly, the report highlights the potential of the information sharing network, Eurosur, to enable member states to “react much faster to any incidents concerning irregular migration and cross-border crime or relating to a risk to the lives of migrants” (Frontex, 2014, p. 57, emphases added) – drawing on the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse to justify more controls.

The securitized crisis discourse amplifies in the 2015 report, which proclaims that “illegal border-crossing reached a new record” in 2014 (Frontex, 2015, p. 5, emphasis added). It stresses that this “unprecedented number… has roots in the fighting in Syria that has resulted in the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War” (Frontex, 2015, p. 5, emphases added). It describes that this has led to more SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean, a new “modus operandi” among smugglers involving the use of cargo ships, and the diversion of resources to refugees and migrants’ “immediate care” rather than intelligence gathering (Frontex, 2015, p. 5). This illustrates banal securitization, with Frontex – despite comparing the situation to WWII – being more concerned with the burden and risk posed by refugees and migrants than their well-being, which also demonstrates the emptiness of its humanitarian discourse (see DeBono, 2019, for a critique of “plastic hospitality”). This co-optation of a humanitarian discourse (cf. Fairclough, 2015, “recontextualization”) is especially evident in Frontex’s

\textsuperscript{103} The Danish police officer described his experience with Frontex operations in Greece as “where order meets disorder”, when it came to the contrast between their work during the day and the party scene that took place on Kos at night (interview 4/3/20).

\textsuperscript{104} The securitized humanitarian crisis discourse is also visual, with the reports’ images portraying border guards as both patrolling the border, saving refugees and migrants at sea, and registering their fingerprints in camps (see Achilleos-Sarll, Sachseder & Stachowitsch, 2023, for depictions of gender and race in Frontex’s risk analysis reports; or Silberstein, 2020, for Frontex’s “visual (in)securitisation”).

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description of the situation in Syria and SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean, with the report underlining that:

Most of these detections were reported as part of search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean area. In 2014, border-control authorities saved the lives of thousands of people. Not all could be saved, unfortunately, as facilitators have increasingly chartered unsafe boats, stretching to the limit the capacities of surveillance and rescue. (Frontex, 2015, p. 17, emphases added)

Here we see the fusion of the securitized crisis discourse with a humanitarian discourse, with refugees and migrants described as both ‘detected’, ‘rescued’, and ‘dead’ – the first two thanks to border guards and the latter at the hands of smugglers. This securitized humanitarian crisis discourse allows Frontex to blame smugglers for these deaths rather than Europe’s restrictive border regime, casting refugees and migrants as victims, border guards as saviors, and smugglers as criminals (see Pallister-Wilkins’, 2015, “victim-savior logic”; or Wodak, 2020, for populist parties’ framing of themselves as “saviors of the nation” from Others). The discursive practices of obscuring and inversion are also at play here, with the humanitarian discourse rationalizing border controls since they ‘save lives’. Frontex’s construction of border control as humanitarian is further illustrated by the 2015 report’s description of the role of the Italian navy operation Mare Nostrum and Frontex’s operation Hermes/Triton as “crucial in rescuing an unprecedented number of migrants” in the Mediterranean (Frontex, 2015, p. 18, emphasis added). The discursive practice of obscuring is present here, however, with Figure 5 in the report revealing that Italy bore the brunt of these operations and that the share of NGO vessels almost equaled that of Frontex vessels, which moderates Frontex’s portrayal of itself as the main humanitarian actor at sea.

The hollowness of the humanitarian discourse is also demonstrated by Frontex’s lack of systematic data collection on deaths at the borders (see also Aas & Gundhus, 2015) and underestimation of this number, with the 2016 report only noting 470 deaths in the Mediterranean in 2015 compared to IOM’s estimate of 3770 missing or dead (Frontex, 2016, p. 8). This vacuousness is also illustrated by the reports’ discursive construction of a trade-off between effective border control and fundamental rights. This is apparent in the 2016 report, which describes the “most pressing challenges for border guards” as how to distinguish “legitimate asylum seekers… from individuals posing a security threat and economic migrants who attempt… to abuse the system” (Frontex, 2016, p. 5,
The report’s table of contents also illustrates Frontex’s perception of refugees and migrants as both ‘a risk’ and ‘at risk’, with sections on “health risks”, “managing violence at the borders”, “border authorities not equipped to deal with large flows”, and “preventing casualties at the border” (Frontex, 2016, p. 3, emphases added). Securitization is here explicit, fueled by the crisis discourse. The preface by the Executive Director reproduces the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, emphasizing that:

The year 2015 was unprecedented for the EU and its external borders, with… 1.8 million detections of illegal entries... [T]he scenes of chaos and the tragic images of those who have lost their lives have sharpened the focus on migration issues. (Frontex, 2016, p. 5, emphases added)

This quote invokes an image of risk, death, and chaos at the borders, securitizing migration by stressing the high number of “illegal entries” rather than numbers of asylum applications or dead and missing at the borders. Focusing on the “challenges” posed by these arrivals, the Executive Director stresses that “in response to the... scale of the threats witnessed, the authorities at the borders must have a capability for risk mitigation at the time of emergency” (Frontex, 2016, p. 5, emphases added). Here securitization is explicit, with the increased number of refugees and migrants being treated analogous to posing a larger threat.106 Drawing on the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, the report highlights that Syrians fleeing the country “accelerated in 2015 when the Syrian humanitarian crisis led to a migratory crisis in the EU” (Frontex, 2016, p. 40, emphasis added), securitizing migration by discursively transforming a refugee crisis to a ‘security threat’ for Europe.

The 2017 report reproduces the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, featuring a section entitled “safety and security concerns in reception centres” (see Williams, 2016, “safety/security nexus”), suggesting that refugees and migrants need to be both care for and controlled (cf. the “paradox of protection”, Bigo, 2006; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). The section describes the European Commission’s hotspot approach in response to the 2015 ‘crisis’ as a “more

105 As we will see in the last chapter, a main tenet of this trade-off is the pull-factor hypothesis (i.e., that SAR operations lead to more smuggling), which was a concern among both the Frontex officials and Swedish coast guards.

106 As Perkowski et al. (2023, p. 121, emphasis added) argue, Frontex’s “spatialization of crisis locates the origin of crisis outside of Europe”, despite being partly caused by the restrictive European migration and border regime.
orderly way to manage disproportionate migratory pressure at the EU’s external borders” (Frontex, 2017, p. 40, emphases added), securitizing migration by containing refugees and migrants in camps at their first point of entry. The official term of these camps, Reception and Identification Centre (RIC), conceals their securitized nature, where refugees and migrants are received only to be detained and potentially deported (see DeBono, 2019, for a discussion of centers in Italy and Malta). Similarly, Frontex’s use of the term “frontline member states” invokes associations to war, with Italy and Greece being portrayed as needing ‘protection’ from refugees and migrants.

Securitization is here enabled by the discursive practices of obscuring and inversion, with the report focusing on the security aspects of the camps rather than of those who live in them – despite their overcrowding (FRA, 2019) – describing riots and fires on Lesvos and in Bulgaria as demonstrating the “tense and unstable situation in reception sites” and the risk this poses to local populations (Frontex, 2017, p. 40, emphasis added). The report highlights similar incidents in the makeshift Idomeni camp on the Greek-Macedonian border and in the ‘jungle’ in Calais, describing them as “requiring constant police presence and interventions to restore and maintain order” (Frontex, 2017, p. 41, emphases added). Securitization is here explicit, with the camps at the external(ized) border being portrayed as anarchic sites in need of Frontex’s (humanitarian) intervention. This is further illustrated by the report’s emphasis that the “control of reception centres poses significant challenges” for border guards and law enforcement authorities, including the “need to deploy special police units to enforce order… and alleviate… fear among local populations”; hosting vulnerable groups in separate accommodation to prevent harm; protecting staff during riots; and the camps attracting “people smugglers, human traffickers and terrorist recruiters”, which has “serious implications for public order” (Frontex, 2017, p. 41, emphases added).

By invoking the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, refugees and migrants are here portrayed as posing a risk to both local populations, each other, and staff in the camps; as well as being at risk of exploitation by smugglers and traffickers (see also Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Illustrating Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control, the report underlines that these issues are exacerbated by the poor conditions in the camps, which “needs improvement because it affects the safety of migrants and refugees as well as the internal security of Member States” (Frontex, 2017, p. 41, emphases added) – rendering
detention as in the best interest of refugees and migrants.\textsuperscript{107} The 2018 report fans the crisis discourse, cautioning that:

Considering the remaining large pool of migrants stranded in Libya, in the immediate future… developments in that area will be most decisive for the overall number of arrivals at the EU’s external border, assuming that the EU-Turkey statement holds. (Frontex, 2018b, p. 38, emphases added)

It predicts several future developments that uphold this crisis scenario, including increased “arrivals of vulnerable people (women, children, persons fleeing conflicts)”, “secondary movements”, and the “underlying threat of terrorism-related movements” (Frontex, 2018b, p. 39, emphases added). This combination of different ‘risks’ illustrates the coalescence of security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses, with the report framing refugees and migrants as both vulnerable subjects and terrorist threats (see Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). As this section has shown, the securitized humanitarian crisis discourse is thus productive, allowing Frontex to 1) securitize migration in both banal and explicit ways; 2) frame border control as humanitarian; and 3) justify increased controls in response to suffering and death at the borders – all of which work to normalize securitization in this field. This theme has hence demonstrated how Frontex’s border knowledge both securitizes migration and normalizes securitization by drawing on a securitized humanitarian crisis discourse, which illustrates the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed how Frontex’s risk analysis reports securitize migration in both banal (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995) and more explicit (Buzan et al., 1998) ways by portraying migration as inevitably tied up with risk, the external(ized) border as in constant crisis, and border control as being in refugees and migrants’ best interest. It has done so by focusing on how Frontex draws on the discursive practices of construction, reproduction, inflation, obscuring, and inversion in 11 different themes, examining how securitization varies in both form and degree (see Figure 4). Through the analysis of the identified themes, the

\textsuperscript{107} Contrary to Frontex’s portrayal of crises as leading to violence at the borders, Perkowski et al. (2023, p. 123, emphases added) contend that “it is… crisis narratives themselves that enable violence: the routinization of crisis narratives in border governance has been accompanied with a routinization of violence to manage such purported moments of exception”.
chapter has shown how Frontex constructs risk by: deploying a dispassionate discourse which de-humanizes refugees and migrants by treating them as insignificant parts of EU-destined ‘flows’, which the external(ized) border must be protected from\textsuperscript{108}, portraying mobility as inherently risky; drawing on a criminalizing law enforcement discourse in describing migration; reproducing the constructed binary between regular and ‘irregular’ mobility; frames risk analysis as indispensable to decision-making in EUropean external(ized) border control; and conflates migration, asylum, crime, and terrorism.

I have also examined how Frontex constructs crisis by (re)producing irregularity and systematically inflating risk and crisis through its double counting practices (Sigona, 2015). The chapter has shown how this border knowledge both inverts and normalizes crisis, with the more recent reports arguing for maintaining preparedness at the external(ized) border despite the lowest number of refugees and migrants since before the 2015 ‘crisis’. This illustrates the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in the reports, with the later reports building on the earlier ones and their crisis discourse – making crises cumulative in Frontex’s border knowledge. The risk analysis reports thus not only (re)produce crisis but normalize it as well. This illustrates the instrumental role of numbers in the reports, which have a legitimizing effect, since “‘trust in numbers’ often surmounts trust in non-quantified claims in policy-making”, so that “decisions about emergency responses… may seem less controversial when they are based on actuarial calculations” (Paul, 2017, p. 697, emphases added).

Lastly, the chapter analyzed Frontex’s construction of humanitarianism in the reports, and how that amounts to what I call inverted humanitarian border control due to the inverted humanitarian logics it draws on. By bringing in a humanitarian discourse, the reports construct hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability, where women and children feature on top and young men at the bottom – banally securitizing the latter. By drawing on the discursive practice of inversion, the risk analysis reports blame smugglers, refugees, and migrants for deaths at the borders rather than EUrope’s restrictive border controls; and frames SAR as a pull-factor, which makes non-rescue seem ‘commonsensical’. The reports draw on the same discourses of security, crisis, and humanitarianism, which coalesce into a securitized humanitarian crisis discourse (cf. Fairclough’s, 2015, interdiscursivity) where refugees and migrants are portrayed as both ‘at risk’ and

\textsuperscript{108} As Bigo et al. (2016, p. 55, emphasis added) point out, “the practice of profiling… operates through the ‘depersonalization’ of the individual by establishing categories of populations following the… sets of criteria that are deemed important by the ‘profiler’”.

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of a humanitarian discourse, Frontex is thus able to justify increased border controls in response to irregularized migration and deaths at the external(ized) border. This can be understood as a discourse co-optation (or re-contextualization, Fairclough, 2015), and illustrates that Frontex’s border knowledge largely reproduces rather than restructures the dominant order of discourse in this field, where the security framing of migration is privileged.109

Together, the themes illustrate the securitized ontology and epistemology of Frontex’s border knowledge, which treats any form of mobility as potentially risky. This illustrates the essence of banal securitization, with the reports not always explaining why migration is necessarily risky, since this is assumed to be understood by its readers. Just like banal nationalism, securitization becomes “invisible because of its obviousness” (Billig, 1995, p. 158, emphasis added). The chapter has also demonstrated the role of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism in normalizing securitization, which is furthered by the strong and frequent securitizations in the reports, coupled with a lack of consideration of alternative framings of irregularized migration (see Figure 5). This is exacerbated by the self-reinforcing role of the risks analysis reports, with Frontex having a stake in exaggerating both risks and crises to expand its budget, mandate, and operations (Campesi, 2014; Paul, 2017; Perkowski et al., 2023) – strengthening its role in European external(ized) border control.

Risks are Frontex’s currency, and just as with capitalism the more risks it can count the more powerful it becomes, gaining its authority “not by reassuring but by worrying” policymakers about what happens at the external(ized) border (Bigo, 2002, pp. 81–82, emphasis added).110 Just as the “state justifies itself as the only political order possible” (Bigo, 2002, p. 67, emphasis added), Frontex portrays securitization as the only sensible response to irregularized migration. In this way, Frontex contributes to what Fairclough (2015) describes as the generation of hegemonic ‘common sense’, portraying securitized responses to migration as commonsensical. As Bigo (2013, p. 125, emphasis added) observes, “knowledge is about struggle over categories and epistemic communities, far from creating knowledge, police it”.

109 As Fairclough (1992, pp. 87–88) points out, “the ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalized, and achieve the status of ‘common sense’”.

110 This follows the “numbers game… underlying logic that higher numbers of irregular migrants… justifies the… exercise of increased control” (Vollmer, 2011, p. 327, emphases added).
As the analysis of the reports has shown, Frontex’s border knowledge leaves out just as many things as it includes.\textsuperscript{111} The discursive practice of obscuring is central in the reports, which mask as much as they reveal about the situation at the external(ized) border by omitting any information about fundamental rights violations and deaths. There are no references to serious incidence reports (SIR) from Frontex operations, complaints received through the Complaints Mechanism, or fundamental rights concerns, which the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) and Consultative Forum (CF) regularly report on.\textsuperscript{112} This systematic non-gathering of data on the risks refugees and migrants are exposed to at EUrope’s borders facilitates the normalization of securitization (see Buzan et al.’s, 1998, “facilitating conditions”) by giving the impression that this does not take place and/or is not worth documenting. Through Frontex’s large-scale production of “non-knowledge” (Scheel, 2022), one must thus read between the lines to infer the implications of what is said or left unsaid in the risk analysis reports for refugees and migrants, which makes this border knowledge a contortion of the situation at the external(ized) border.\textsuperscript{113} As Aas and Gundhus (2015, p. 12, emphases added) point out:

The act of collecting numbers is an expression of a political will to acknowledge and to know a phenomenon. Knowledge of death is therefore intrinsically connected to an acknowledgement of death.

The reports’ routine obscuring of fundamental rights is evident in the section on “refusals of entry” at the external border, which makes no reference to how many of those refused entry expressed their intent to apply for asylum or were summarily returned. This break-down would have made this indicator more transparent and facilitated monitoring of non-refoulement. In addition to banally securitizing migration, (mis)categorizing everyone who crosses the external(ized) border as ‘migrants’ obscures EUropean member states’ legal

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{111} See Billig’s (1995, p. 13) example of how a newspaper article left out the reason as to why the Flemish speaking minority in Belgium want to become an independent state, since nationalism needs no explanation due to its perceived ‘naturalness’.

\textsuperscript{112} The FRO’s first public report came out in 2021, ten years after the establishment of this role. The FRO’s regular reports to the Executive Director and Management Board are never referenced in Frontex’s risk analysis reports, and the FRO official emphasized that the office had a bad relationship with the former Executive Director, who limited the agenda time for fundamental rights issues in the Management Board meetings (interview 12/2/21).

\textsuperscript{113} See Glouftsios (2023b) for how non-knowledge about border violence is maintained through Frontex’s practices of hiding and obfuscation.}
obligations towards them, which can be more easily skirted when they are seen as ‘illegal border-crossings’ rather than asylum-seekers. The discourse in the reports thus resembles Orwellsian doublespeak, where the human consequences of increased border controls can only be carefully elicited by readers with sufficient fundamental rights knowledge and legal expertise, which makes the reports inaccessible and incomplete documents despite being presented as the opposite.

This obscuring of fundamental rights can be seen in the 2014 report, which explains the increase in “detections” at the land border with Ceuta and Melilla as “associated with more effective prevention of departures at sea by the Moroccan authorities and enhanced prevention measures in the Mediterranean Sea, including the… JO Indalo” (Frontex, 2014, p. 30, emphases added). “Prevention of departures” here refer to pullbacks and “enhanced prevention measures” to deterrence. Similarly, the report notes “several violent incidents of migrants attempting to cross the fence in large groups… sometimes resulting in casualties” (Frontex, 2014, p. 39, emphases added). It does not mention the triple border fence which allows only the most fit to climb it in larger groups in order to not be pushed back by border guards. Instead, the reader gets the impression that: 1) it is only migrants (not refugees) climbing the fence; 2) they are violent towards border guards (rather than acting in self-defense); and 3) that deaths are inevitable and that the only solution is to prevent people from climbing the fence. Here the discursive practice of inversion is also apparent, with the report inverting both blame and deviance, along with normalizing border deaths and securitization. This obscures the fact that deaths at this border section have been a regular occurrence since the early 2000s, which have been accompanied by successive reinforcements of the border fence.114 Thus, just as winners in wars count their victories rather than victims (Billig, 1995, p. 2), Frontex counts border crossings rather than deaths.

The reports also conflate humanitarianism with smuggling by not detailing the motivations of those who assist refugees and migrants on their journey, thus lumping together those who do it for profit and out of solidarity. This is evident in Frontex’s definition of smuggling as “the process of facilitating the unlawful entry, transit or residence of an individual in a country with or without obtaining financial or other benefits” (Frontex, 2021i, p. 18, emphasis added). Not breaking down the statistics into for profit smuggling vs. humanitarian assistance obscures

114 This resulted in the deaths of dozens of refugees and migrants in June 2022 at the hands of Moroccan and Spanish border guards, which sparked condemnation by civil society actors (Heller, 2022).
the difference between the two, criminalizes the latter, and inflates the actual number of smugglers (see CoE, 2023a; Mainwaring & DeBono, 2021, for the criminalization of SAR NGOs after the 2015 ‘crisis’). This shows that Frontex’s border knowledge *disinforms* as much as it informs about reality on the ground for refugees and migrants, producing a situational *unawareness* of fundamental rights at the external(ized) border through its non-collection of data on suffering and deaths – contributing to a “state-produced social oblivion” in this field (Kalir & van Schendel, 2017, p. 1). As Borrelli (2018, p. 107) points out, “ignorance explains how knowledge is manipulated and how non-knowledge is produced, used, reproduced and acted upon by state agents” to the detriment of refugees and migrants. We will explore this further in the next chapter.

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115 The blurring of humanitarianism and smuggling impacts NGO’s work on the ground, with Drop in the Ocean’s guidelines for volunteers on Lesvos warning against offering a ride to refugees and migrants since that could fall under the definition of facilitating ‘illegal’ transit and thus be charged as smuggling. A Greek law from 2020 also requires the registration of all NGOs and its international volunteers in order to be able to operate, which made it more difficult for Drop in the Ocean to recruit volunteers. In 2023, the Greek government opened criminal proceedings against the founder of Aegean Boat Report for facilitating “illegal” entry of refugees and migrants by operating an alarm phone (see Lawlor, 2023).
This chapter seeks to answer the second research question, shifting attention from the role of Frontex’s border knowledge in securitizing migration to whether and how securitization is normalized among civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials. Methodologically, the analysis remains on the second dimension (discursive practice) of Fairclough’s (2015) three-dimensional model but focuses not only on the production of discourse but also its consumption. The chapter thus contributes empirically to the study of the role of the audience (Buzan et al., 1998), and especially bureaucrats, in securitizing migration through their routine practices (Bigo, 2002).

The interviews and fieldwork constitute the main empirical material for the chapter, which proceeds as follows: the first section examines how border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials both resist and reproduce banal securitization and its normalization through their attempts at (de)politicizing border control and shifting blame for its harmful effects. The second section analyzes how the different actors contribute to the normalization of inverted humanitarian border control in this field both discursively and in practice. The third section explores how civil society actors discursively resist the securitized crisis discourse but unwittingly reproduce it through their practices on the ground.
Blame Shifting and (De)Politicization of Border Control

The... study of bureaucratic behaviour... highlight a general disinterest and incomprehension on the side of the bureaucrat towards their clients... However, the encounters are not only demarcated by indifference... but also by ignorance. (Borrelli, 2018, pp. 95–96, emphases added)

This section analyzes how border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials both reproduce and resist securitization through their attempts to (de)politicize border control and shift blame for its harmful consequences for refugees and migrants. I understand politicization as the act of making something become political in character, and de-politicization as taking an issue out of the realm of politics. Whereas politicization facilitates blame shifting in that responsibility for restrictive border controls is shifted up to the political level (cf. Guiraudon, 2002), de-politicization rationalizes securitization by presenting border control as a managerial tool to deal with unwanted migration (Follis, 2018; Paul, 2018). I argue that de-politicization of border control contributes to banal securitization since it normalizes securitized responses to irregularized migration by appealing to the technical and objective nature of border controls (see Follis, 2018; Fjørtoft, 2022; Paul, 2018). Politicization, on the other hand, allows the interviewees to counter critique for the consequences of border controls since they are only implementing political decisions.

While efforts at de-politicizing border control thus indicates securitization’s normalization in this field, politicization indicates resistance in that it shows the interviewees’ awareness of the negative consequences for refugees and migrants, for which they do not want to be (unfairly) blamed for. It is hence a weak form of resistance which does not necessarily change the status quo (cf. Fairclough, 2015) but nonetheless indicates that securitization is not completely normalized among the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials (see Figure 5). Efforts at both politicization and de-politicization is illustrated in the quote below, where the Frontex official working in the Situational Monitoring and Response Division explains the reason for the lack of SAR operations in the Mediterranean:

The Lampedusa incident triggered that politicians said ‘this can never happen again’... And the result was that- because that’s politically decided, that’s not Frontex deciding- … the operational area [of Triton] would be going nearly until the North African coast... Because Europe wants to prevent that people die at sea.
So we went with… the planes and vessels… close to the North African coast, with the result… that Frontex became like a ferry company for people from Africa who wants to go to Europe… I’m not taking a position here, I’m not saying I’m against or in favor of migrants, that’s much too complex… But that was simply the reality… the criminal organizations they adjust, they sent people in- that was horrible to see, we could see it from our Situation Centre- … small boats which… did not have the potential to reach anything, with too many people, no life jackets, they were just pushed out to sea, and they were saved, and they were brought… to Italy, yeah? The consequence was that politicians said ‘hey, but we cannot go on like that, we are bringing thousands of migrants just like that to Europe and we don’t want that’. Again not my decision, I am just saying how it goes. The mind changes and then Frontex was asked to organize the operational area not that close to North Africa. And now we have the operational area closer to Italy. (interview 23/6/2021, emphases in original)

Here we see the simultaneous politicization and de-politicization of border control, with the Frontex official politicizing border control in order to shift blame for deaths at sea to EUropean policymakers while de-politicizing it by framing SAR as a pull-factor being “simply the reality”’. The decision to patrol further away from where most boats shipwreck in order to save lives mirrors the logic of non-rescue in Frontex’s border knowledge, which illustrates the normalization of securitization in this field. He further complained that working in such a politicized context was difficult, describing Frontex as being scapegoated for political decisions taken over their heads:

Frontex is an executive agency, so we follow what the regulations are saying. The difficulty for us is to really make it happen and to implement what the politicians want… I think that we have to ask our political masters, ‘what do you really want from us?’ Instead of being scapegoated… If you look into our presence in the Mediterranean… this is not Frontex deciding… it is Italy and Malta deciding. If Italy tomorrow says ‘Frontex, we want an operation close to the North African borders’ we will have probably this… But Italy says ‘no, we don’t want that’, so then you cannot blame Frontex for not being fully present in the Mediterranean close to North Africa… If in the Atlantic Ocean we do not have aerial surveillance, that is not because Frontex doesn’t want to, but that’s because Spain doesn’t ask for it. (interview 23/6/2021, emphases in original)
This quote shows how the Frontex official is able to blame member states for the lack of SAR operations in the Mediterranean by emphasizing the political nature of such decisions in European external(ized) border control. This illustrates a however weak resistance towards the securitization of migration in this field, which indicates that it is not totally normalized. His colleague, on the other hand, de-politicized border control by describing member states’ relaxation of border controls during the 2015 ‘crisis’ as unlawful “political decisions”:

And then every single state along the [Balkan] route were basically doing illegal things, because they were facilitating illegal border crossings of these people, they were even transporting them. And it was the law enforcement agencies that were transporting them. And then Germany sends six trains a day to Austria to pick up migrants. So they were all illegal border crossings, because none of them were any kind of asylum-seekers yet, it was just a political decision and then they didn’t follow the law... These are complicated issues but... border control... should not be politically directed, we should do what the law says. And... in 2015 we saw that the political will overruled basically the law (interview 6/7/2021, emphases in original).

Rather than being politically directed, this interviewee describes border control as being neutral and apolitical, which is similar to the portrayal in Frontex’s border knowledge (see also Campesi, 2022; Follis, 2018; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2018). The quote illustrates how banal securitization is the norm rather than the exception within Frontex (à la the Paris School), being so embedded in its workings that this official is critical of policymakers’ deviations from it. It also points to a discursive struggle (Fairclough, 2015) in this field, illustrating how securitization is “generated through a confrontation between the strategies of political actors... in the national political field...[and] the security professionals” who possess the “practical know-how” (Bigo, 2002, pp. 75–76, emphasis added). Both (de)politicization and blame shifting thus strengthen Frontex’s role as an independent agency in European external(ized) border control. As Paul (2017, p. 696, emphases added) points out:

The identification of ‘bad performers’ or ‘weak border spots’ through risk analysis may enable EU-level regulators to demand more coordinated border enforcement, justify their own legitimacy as risk regulators and reject blame for failure which risk analysis evidences as being related to member states’ own incapacities.
Similar to the risk analysis reports’ shifting of blame for border deaths from restrictive border controls to smugglers, refugees, and migrants themselves; the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials insisted that they were not the ones responsible for fundamental rights violations at the external(ized) border, pointing to each other and member states (see also Tsourdi, 2020). The Frontex officials were frustrated by what they saw as contradictory directions from EUropean policymakers, feeling thrown under the bus by them:

Politically what has been Frontex’s role since the beginning is that you are the scapegoat for the politicians and for the Commission. The Commission says ‘if something happens, we have to react. What do we do? Let’s reinforce Frontex, give Frontex more money’. Then they say ‘we have done what we can’, and if it fails ‘okay, the agency could not deliver or member states did not deliver to the agency’… [I]f you would find one politician in any member state who commit themselves and say that ‘we take 10% of all migrants who are coming- whether they come 10,000 or 10 million…’, nobody will commit to that. But rather they come illegally and then you blame border management. (interview 6/7/2021, emphases in original)

Here we see a slight resistance towards securitization, in that the interviewee is critical of member states’ unwillingness to accept more refugees and migrants, which entices them to come “illegally” instead. His colleague described a “police culture” among the Management Board members, with a reluctance to speak up about colleagues. According to him, this paralyzes the escalation procedure of the vulnerability assessments, which takes place if member states fail to implement Frontex’s recommendations, preventing it from reaching the EU institutions (interview 23/6/2021). The Frontex officials also noted difficulties in negotiations with member states on fundamental rights safeguards in operational plans, explaining that if they would point out an area of concern, some member states would simply brush it off, while others would be worried about the reporting lines of serious incidents at the border and if they would be the first ones to know (interviews 6/7/21, 15/7/21).

This blame shifting illustrates the Frontex officials’ resistance towards securitization, which in their eyes comes from the member states and the Commission rather than Frontex. When asked about pushbacks, one of them pointed fingers at EUropean policymakers’ double-standards:

Frontex is very often put in a very difficult situation. The Greeks are currently
clearly having a… politically steered practice… of *pushing back* people… I’m not saying that they do something illegal, I don’t know that… But the Greeks have a certain practice developed that people who are in Turkish territorial waters… they… talk to them and understand that they don’t ask for asylum, and they say they have to be returned to Turkey. There is *a lot* of allegations around that… *a lot* of media attention… I find it a very difficult situation to consider… I’m not going to question the explanation by the Greeks, that’s what they have explained, that’s what it is. The next step what the Greeks are doing is that they leave these people on the open sea and the people have to wait for the Turks to rescue them… that’s a step that is not respectable for the people. But at the same time… you have to ask yourself… the politicians, the member states, what are they saying about the situation? Are they judging that the Greeks are doing something wrong? I don’t hear them say this. Hungary has been convicted by the Court of Justice but Greece not. *But* in the media and the allegations, the questions go ‘what is the role of Frontex?’ And then Frontex is definitely not involved in the pushbacks itself… So that’s where I come again to the scapegoating. Frontex is being put in a position that they *support* Greece. What should Frontex do? Should we *withdraw*, should we *continue*? We see what the Greeks are doing as maybe not being entirely correct… It’s… why I find it a very… double and sometimes hypocritical situation. (interview 23/6/2021, emphases in original)

This quote illustrates *discursive resistance* among Frontex’s own ranks towards pushbacks, with the official being skeptical of the Greek coast guard’s operational practices. It also reveals a plea for clearer political guidance to navigate the complex field in which Frontex operates, despite the Frontex officials’ proclamations of border control being apolitical. This internal discursive struggle is important since it indicates that securitization is not fully normalized *within* Frontex, although it is the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, this resistance is rather weak, which is illustrated by the fact that the Frontex official does not question the Greek coast guard’s explanation, insisting “that’s what it is” (cf. Bigo’s, 2002, “denial”). Blame shifting and the politicization of border control is further illustrated in the quote below, where another Frontex official describes his involvement in the planning of EUNAVFOR MED and how their instructions changed according to the mood of the day:

The instructions to draft was that ‘nobody wants this, write it accordingly’, which was easy to say that way because when it comes to migrants we have already an EU agency doing the job there in the Mediterranean, why would you need this?
Then this Lampedusa case happened, Mogherini was the High Representative, there was a mood asking that ‘start planning, in two weeks we need to have a boat sailing’. So it was really a political exercise, then politicians needed to show that they react. (interview 6/7/2021, emphases added)

(De)politicization thus rationalizes securitization for the Frontex officials, allowing them to portray increased border controls interchangeably as a political decision or a technical one, which obscures the responsibilities for and consequences of their work. Whereas the Frontex officials felt scapegoated by the Commission and the member states, the DG Home officials felt unfairly blamed by everyone, highlighting the tendency to “blame Brussels” and equate the EU with the Commission (see Wodak, 2020, for scapegoating as a common discursive strategy). The interviewee working on Schengen and external borders underlined that it was “typical” that the co-legislators want strong control of EU agencies during the negotiations, but that when something goes wrong everyone turns to the Commission for answers:

When people talk about the EU it’s always identified with the Commission, and the European Parliament is being seen as making sure that the Commission doesn’t go totally wild. But it’s not really considered part of the EU… as a co-legislator… being also responsible for the legislation they adopt, but rather as the critical body. And the Council is always the member states… when you look at national media you have the impression that member states are nowhere when it comes to the EU… But of course it’s… handy for national politics to blame Brussels when something is not liked… and to assume all the credit if something works out. (interview 15/4/2021, emphases in original)

Similar to the Frontex officials, the DG Home official drew attention to the hypocrisy of member states’ calls to strengthen the external border despite not properly implementing the existing legislation. She was critical of member states’ prolonged temporary border controls after the 2015 ‘crisis’, questioning both their purpose and effects:

Yeah, I mean it’s a bit tricky… But what is pretty clear… is that objectively the situation is not very different than from before 2015. The number of migrants are back to I think 2013 levels, the threat of terrorism- yes, is there, but at the same time has always been there, will always be there. Of course we’ve had more attacks over the last couple of years than we had before, but most of these attacks came
from residents of these countries—nationals of these countries—that were second or third generation migrants, and you are not going to address threats from these people by setting up border controls, because they are in your country already, and legally in your country. So our impression is that border controls are more and more used… as a symbol for the country taking decisive action, you know? ‘We are securing our borders’. No matter whether it objectively changes much. And we have an issue in the sense that the Schengen Borders Code is… conceived as something where you can set up temporary controls again, but it then really departs from the idea that this is… for 6 months. (interview 14/4/2021, emphases in original)

Here we see how the DG Home official discursively resists securitization by shifting blame to member states. This resistance is weak, however, because when asked what actions the Commission had taken to remedy this situation she admitted that they had not initiated infringement procedures against these member states, although acknowledging that there were “different opinions on this” (interview 14/4/21). Similarly, when asked about the possibility of opening more legal pathways for low to medium-skilled migrants to prevent irregularized journeys, the DG Home official working on legal migration dismissed it since legal migration is not an EU competence, pointing to member states instead (interview 13/9/21). Both he and the DG Home official working with migrant smuggling questioned the link between the opening of legal pathways and reduction of irregularized migration and smuggling (interview 15/10/21), which illustrates the normalization of securitization in this field. The DG Home official working on visa policy was also skeptical of the creation of an EU humanitarian visa as a safe and legal route, emphasizing the security concerns it would entail:

No, no. This is a no go. Member states are responsible for issuing humanitarian visas, and to… create a humanitarian visa at EU-level in the Visa Code will never be accepted by member states, especially in the current context… [T]his will be a door open to huge migration… imagine the amount of people who would like to come to the EU… And if there was an automatic right to come because you are in a humanitarian situation, how many millions should we welcome every year? And that we don’t currently have the capacity to integrate… I’m in favor of legal migration, I’m in favor of resettlement. But we also need some limitations of how many you can take each year… Short-stay visas are issued for people who have an intention to return… that’s what you assess when you grant a visa. If you assess that the person has no intention to return then you don’t grant the visa, this is totally
in contradiction with visa policy… The ideal situation would be to have a bell
(laughs) at the border where you could apply [for asylum]… But we would have
so many applications, how would you deal with that? … You should take half of
the population of Afghanistan, women, who would be entitled to come to the EU,
that’s how it would be.116 (interview 8/10/21, emphases in original)

Apart from gatekeeping what visa policy ‘actually is’; this quote illustrates the
coaescence of security, crisis, and humanitarian logics, with the interviewee
construing refugees and migrants as a ‘security threat’ in need of regulation; a
‘horde’ of people that would come; but also in need of protection. The security
and crisis concerns trump the humanitarian one, however, with the interviewee
portraying an improved protection regime as a naïve utopia which would
compromise internal EUropean security – which is illustrated by the joke that
asylum-seekers should be able to “ring a bell” at the border (a referral mechanism
supposed to be provided by border guards). The DG Home official also resisted
securitization, however, in that he was critical of the use of visa policy as a
migration control tool, arguing that these policy areas have nothing to do with
each other. He pointed out that this linkage came about with the “security drive”
after the 2015 ‘crisis’, but believed that visa facilitation is not a strong enough
incentive for third countries to cooperate with the EU (interview 8/10/21).

The interviews with the Frontex and DG Home officials thus illustrate how
(de)politicization and blame shifting disperse accountability across a multitude
of actors, which facilitates the continued securitization of migration in this field
since the number of counter-discourses and resistance remains weak (see Figure
5). This is also evident among the Swedish coast guards, who rejected
responsibility for what happens to refugees and migrants outside of their
immediate care:

I read in the media about these ‘pushbacks’… that is nothing the Swedish coast
guard- we took care of human rights and that everyone had the right to seek
asylum… we made no attempt to push anyone back, we saw to it that they were
rescued, and as I said, everyone wants to seek asylum, so the Italian authorities had
to take care of that. (interview 17/3/21, emphases added)

Similar to the Frontex officials, this demonstrates the Swedish coast guard’s
discursive resistance towards the securitization of migration in this field, being

116 This was incidentally the EUAA’s (2023) recommendation two years later.
critical of the pushbacks taking place in the Mediterranean. The interviewee draws on a humanitarian discourse in rationalizing his work, which for him was to rescue people at sea and respect their fundamental rights (see DeBono, 2019a). This indicates that securitization is not necessarily normalized among Frontex’s own border guards. This resistance is only discursive, however, with the Swedish coast guard continuing to participate in Frontex operations, despite having internal discussions whether they should withdraw (interviews 2/3/21, 8/3/21, 15/3/21, 17/3/21). The quote also illustrates the limited scope of Frontex’s humanitarian border control, with the coast guards considering their job done after disembarkation, with whatever happens to people next being member states’ responsibility (see also Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). This is further demonstrated by the quote from his colleague, who emphasized that:

We who are at sea cannot do much more than what we do, we can save lives and take them ashore, then we cannot do anything more... We are there in the boats, then there’s all the other authorities who take over... it is their immigration system and investigations and everything, it is their responsibility. (interview 8/3/21, emphases added)

Politicizing border control, the Swedish coast guards blamed bureaucracy, politics, and questionable ethics as obstacles for doing their work properly in Greece and Italy:

If I may allow myself to be a little critical of how the operations are carried out, I think that one is completely left to the host country. In this case Greece is the host country, and no matter what they say, we must follow it, because it is their main responsibility. But it also means that it becomes difficult at times... purely morally and ethically... to follow their recommendations, and I know of a number of incidents... that you do not carry out according to normal seafaring standards, you expose the migrants to greater risks than you need ... Of course one must understand that Greece and Italy... have had very, very much for a long time and there is fatigue and it is a policy too, the right-wing parties are growing... But... what I experience is that in various ways one sometimes tries to make it difficult or even prevent the possibility of seeking asylum. And I have had... a lot of dialogues over the years with NGOs... and they point out different things, and there is evidence I believe. (interview 2/3/21, emphases added)
This quote illustrates greater discursive resistance towards securitization than among the Frontex and DG Home officials, which suggests that it is less normalized among the Swedish coast guards, with the humanitarian discourse being more pronounced than the security and crisis ones (see DeBono, 2019b). As the interviewee points out, however, they still need to follow Greek recommendations, which means that they inadvertently end up banally securitizing migration through their everyday routine work. (De)politicization and blame shifting thus work in tandem to obscure the securitized nature of border controls and responsibility for their harmful effects, both of which contribute to normalize securitization in this field. This is evident in the quote by the Frontex official in the Operational Response Division, who argued that asylum and migration cannot be solved by border control alone, which needs to involve better asylum and migration policies by member states:

If Erdogan decides that they will push one million out of Turkey to Europe… the success of the border control is first of all you know who is coming, you filter out those potential terrorists… those who are vulnerable groups and asylum-seekers. And everybody is then again put through the national processes accordingly. And then again with the EU context… everybody knows that… none of them want to stay in Greece. They… come there with the photographs of a guy leaning on a Mercedes in front of the house, ‘this is my cousin, I want to go to Germany, I want to have… a house and a car like my cousin’… [B]ut it’s not for border management to… decide. They process everyone who comes across and say that ‘okay, this guy has a criminal record and he’s not looking for international protection’. But it doesn’t solve anything, it just… should help the next processes to be carried out. And then those who are not entitled to stay should be returned... But it’s just one step of this… it’s only a management tool, it’s not the solution to anything…[T]hese are those issues that you might know but there’s nothing you can do, then you just accept your role and act accordingly. It’s the same thing, is police blamed for the level of criminality in a country? (interview 6/7/2021, emphases in original)

This quote illustrates how the Frontex official banally securitizes migration by reproducing stereotypes of refugees and migrants as opportunity seekers and linking it with crime. He thus reproduces the security discourse in Frontex’s border knowledge, which contributes to normalizing in it. Securitization’s normalization in this field is illustrated by the fact that despite the Frontex official being critical of how migration and asylum is managed in EUrope, he resigns to ‘just do his job’, believing that border guards are unable to make a difference. He
also de-politicizes border control by portraying it as a neutral “management tool” for filtering cross-border mobility (see also Bigo, 2014), which glosses over its exclusionary effects and obscures the securitization of migration by framing border control as a purely technical rather than political issue. As Paul (2017, pp. 703–704, emphases added) points out, “articulating border control decisions as… ‘self-evident’ automatisms based on ‘neutral’ actuarial calculations” erases “scrutiny of risk analysts’ and risk managers’ liability for potential human rights breaches”.

This is demonstrated by the interviewee’s conviction that Frontex should not “take a stance” in political debates about migration and border control but act as a “neutral” operational arm of policies:

This is my strong point of view and it comes mostly from the professional background of [Nordic country], that if you are border control or law enforcement you are not taking a side either way. We don’t say that the borders should be closed or should be open. You are performing tasks, you are a rule of law organization, so what the legislators say to do you try to do the best way you can… And… not take a stand on policy issues, because we are not policymakers we are practitioners, we… take what the law is and apply it… I think that the agency is unfairly blamed about pushbacks… if they think there is a pushback in Greece by the agency and say ‘you should stop the operations in Greece’, what would be different? What we know from our operations is that… those resources which are deployed under our operational umbrella… would not do any kind of misconduct in this respect. So the problem is that if Frontex goes away from Greece they will be even more desperate because of less surveillance, and they see that they are left alone- what will be the political reaction to this? And would it solve the problem? I don’t… think so… These are complicated issues but… border control… should not be politically directed. (interview 6/7/2021, emphases added)

Similar to his colleague in the Situational Awareness and Monitoring Division, this official believes that Frontex is unfairly blamed for member states’ unlawful practices. This rejection of complicity in pushbacks illustrates discursive resistance towards these securitized practices, which he terms “misconduct”. His reasoning that the fundamental rights situation would be even worse if Frontex withdrew from Greece resonates with that of his colleagues and the Swedish coast

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117 See Ekstedt (2023) for how “trained indifference” among EUAA caseworkers help them distance themselves from ethical dilemmas in asylum case processing.
guards, which we will see in the following sections. Nevertheless, the interviewee’s portrayal of Frontex as an operational agency blindly following the letter of the law not only de-politicizes border control but sanitizes its oppressive effects (see Follis, 2018), which contributes to normalizing securitization in this field. This is in line with Bigo’s (2014, p. 214) findings that border guards see themselves as “the eyes and arms of justice” at the border, taking pride in their ability to distinguish between “what they perceive as legality/illegality”; as well as the FRO official’s description of them understanding their role as being both the judge and jury of asylum-seekers’ legitimacy (interview 12/4/21).

The Frontex official’s understanding of bureaucrats’ role being solely to execute tasks reflects an uncritical attitude towards one’s work, which is similar to Billig’s (1995) description of citizens’ (un)conscious forgetting of banal nationalism in their everyday lives. Whether the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials’ “denial” (Bigo, 2002) or “forgetting” (Billig, 1995) of banal securitization is deliberate is difficult to determine, but either way it contributes to normalizing securitization in this field since it becomes increasingly taken for granted among them and part of the hegemonic ‘common sense’ (Fairclough, 2015). As Bigo (2014, p. 214) notes, since the “logic of control” for Frontex officials is one of filtering and “risk management”, their solution to irregularized migration becomes managerial. Although partly resisting securitization discursively, they nonetheless reproduce it through the execution of their daily tasks, “treating, with detachment, the human beings who arrive at the borders, without becoming embroiled in each individual case, and keeping the figures and percentages correct” (Bigo, 2002, p. 2016, emphasis added).

The technocratic framing of border control thus seems to obfuscate the discriminatory practices that go into it to the point that they cease to appear as such for the people further removed from them, which contributes to normalize securitization in this field. This is indicated by the fact that when asked what they found the most challenging about their work, none of the Frontex and DG Home officials mentioned the consequences of restrictive border controls for refugees and migrants, rather emphasizing their day-to-day struggles of a heavy work load and high expectations from their managers and the policy-level (interviews 23/6/2021, 6/7/2021, 15/7/2021, 15/10/21). This was not the case for the border guards, who through their deployment at sea witnessed first-hand the risks that refugees and migrants are exposed to during their irregularized journey, and stressed that as the most challenging aspect of their work (interviews 2/3/21,
The findings from this limited interview sample therefore indicate that securitization is more normalized among the Frontex and DG Home officials than the border guards who are charged with the implementation of border controls on the ground, which indicates that it is not entirely normalized in this field.

The normalization of securitization among the DG Home officials is further illustrated by their inability to see the relevance of their work for their colleagues in other sections, treating asylum, border control, visas, legal migration, and smuggling as distinct policy areas (interviews 13/9/21, 8/10/21). As highlighted in the historical overview chapter, this reflects the bureaucratic embeddedness of banal securitization in European(ized) border control, where it is routinely reproduced in the work at DG Home. The Frontex officials’ feelings of being scapegoated for the lack of SAR and pushbacks in the Mediterranean corroborates Bigo’s (2014, p. 212, emphasis added) findings that they consider claims that they are waging a “war on migrants… false views spread to delegitimize them”, insisting that they “are just trying to ‘protect the legal rules’ of the country” and “disciplining chaotic flows of people”. His interviewees similarly saw their work as humanitarian rather than “coercive”, benefitting “migrants, who… do not understand the risks they face by travelling in small boats” (Bigo, 2014, p. 213, emphasis added).

This section has illustrated how the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials both resist and reproduce securitization by (de)politicizing border control and shifting blame to each other for its harmful effects. It has shown that the interviewees’ attempts at politicization and blame shifting indicate their discursive resistance towards securitization, since they do not want to be held accountable for what they see as wrongful decisions taken over their head (such as less SAR) or unlawful actions by other actors in this field (e.g., pushbacks). This indicates that securitization is not altogether normalized in this field. Vice versa, the section has shown how efforts at de-politicizing border control indirectly furthers banal securitization and its normalization, with the interviewees’ reasoning that they merely do their job, not problematizing the...
human consequences of their work. Just like Americans see their flag “far too often” to notice it (Billig, 1995, p. 58), the same is the case with banal securitization for some of the interviewees, who (in)advertently end up reproducing it through their “forgetting” (Billig, 1995) or “denial” (Bigo, 2002) of its existence. Nevertheless, as Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2014, p. 130, emphases added) point out, “highlighting the managerial outlook of border control and the normalizing effects stemming from EU activities… does not entail that such practices are harmless”. Perhaps more than a conscious act, the findings indicate that banal securitization is uncritically reproduced by the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials – in a similar way as Billig’s (1995) banal nationalism.

As Bigo (2002, p. 69, emphases added) points out, these actors “live in the myths about polity, sovereignty, and state”, which “structure their… way of thinking and acting concerning a ‘political problem’”. This does not necessarily mean that they “believe in the myths they disseminate” (Bigo, 2002, p. 69, emphasis in original), but that the security discourse is the one that is the most readily available to them, being dominant in this field. To paraphrase Billig (1995, p. 161), just like banal nationalism, banal securitization denies its own existence, which makes it difficult to detect. As we will see in the following, the normalization of securitization in this field is furthered by the civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials’ conviction that they are contributing to the best interests of refugees and migrants, invoking the same humanitarian discourse as Frontex’s border knowledge.

**Normalizing Inverted Humanitarian Border Control**

Having examined how border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials banally securitize migration and contribute to its normalization by (de)politicizing border control and shifting blame for its harmful effects, this section turns to how they do so by drawing on a humanitarian discourse to legitimize a securitized response to irregularized migration. It will do so by examining how these actors, including civil society actors, reproduce the care and control duality in Frontex’s border knowledge and portray non-rescue and push and pullbacks as humanitarian. This

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120 See Borrelli (2018, pp. 95, 107, emphases added) for how “ignorance as a tactic in the daily work of bureaucrats” contributes to “a banal… reproduction of harmful effects” for refugees and migrants.
inversion of humanitarianism alludes to the term’s *plasticity* (see DeBono, 2019b) in this field, coming to mean whatever these actors want it to mean.121 As the analysis of Frontex’s risk analysis reports has demonstrated, the discursive practices of inversion and obscuring are key to inverted humanitarian border control, which the following sub-sections will show is the case in this wider field as well. The section will also demonstrate the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field, with the interviewees drawing on the same discourses of security, crisis, and humanitarianism that can be found in Frontex’s reports. But first, let us briefly revisit the notion of humanitarian border control in the literature.

According to critical border and migration scholars, humanitarian border control is characterized by the “care and control duality”, where refugees and migrants are seen as both *at risk* and *a risk to* EUrope (Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Little & Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). Central to this is the “paradox of protection”, which refers to the balance between “the protection of the *individual* against harm and the protection of *borders* and an internal space” (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015, p. 54, emphases added; see also Bigo, 2006, pp. 89–90). As the preceding chapters have shown, this ambivalence marks responses to irregularized migration, with Pallister-Wilkins (2018, p. 994) noting that humanitarianism’s traditional concern with care for distant ‘Others’ has transformed into keeping ‘Others’ distant as these are showing up on EUrope’s doorstep. Similarly, De Lauri (2018, p. 11, emphases added) argues that so-called “humanitarian borders” (see Walters, 2011) “reflect the political and legal shift whereby *policing operations* become articulations of politics of *compassion*”. Cuttitta (2014) further points out the double standards in EUrope’s humanitarian border control, focusing on the humanitarian consequences of *smuggling* rather than restrictive migration policies and border controls.

As Pallister-Wilkins (2015, pp. 54, 59, emphasis added) warns, we should not mistake humanitarianism for “an act of kindness” but rather an act “based on hierarchies of power utilized for the *governance of populations*”. In the same vein, Cusumano (2019) argues that the discrepancy between Frontex’s humanitarian discourse and its practices at sea is an *intentional decoupling*, which allows it to respond to conflicting demands from member states to curb irregularized migration while at the same time save lives (see Ekstedt, 2022, for a similar decoupling in the EUAA). This resonates with Lavenex’s (2018, p.

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121 Compare Humpty Dumpty’s assertion that “when I use a word… it means just what I choose it to mean” (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 186, emphasis in original).
argument that the CEAS is characterized by “organized hypocrisy”, which she describes as an “organizational strategy to cope with irreconcilable demands” of the EU’s liberal norms and its restrictive asylum policies. Furthermore, Mainwaring (2019, pp. 1, 12) conceptualizes the lack of coordinated European SAR operations in the Mediterranean as “the politics of neglect” enabled by the portrayal of the sea as a “mare nullius”, being a “(neo)colonial strategy… [which] obscures the complicity of EU policies… in migrant deaths”. Like Hellström (2006, p. 174, emphases added) notes:

The idea of ‘hospitality’ entails being welcoming to strangers. To act hospitably is, however, also a way to separate the ‘hosts’ (Europeans) from the newcomers… and put into practice, the ideals of ‘hospitality’ and ‘solidarity’ are correlated with a demarcation line between legal and illegal immigrants.

It is the normalization of this inverted humanitarian border control among actors in this field that the following sub-sections will unpack.

The Reproduction of the Care and Control Duality

Protection… is linked with management… monitoring… surveillance and the creation of profiles about who is at risk or who is a risk and with the movement of population without too much risk. (Bigo, 2006, p. 90, emphases added)

This sub-section explores how the NGO Drop in the Ocean and the border guards banally securitize migration through their reproduction of the care and control duality (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) that characterizes Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control. Similar to citizens’ everyday reproduction of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), they do so inadvertently through the discourses that they draw on and their control-oriented practices on the ground (see also DeBono, 2019a). By reproducing the securitized humanitarian discourse in Frontex’s border knowledge these actors further naturalize it (see Fairclough, 2015) and as such contribute to normalizing securitization in this field, without being aware of it.

Through my fieldwork and interviews with volunteers, I observed how Drop in the Ocean reproduced hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability in their operations. This is evident in the quote by a volunteer on the Greek islands, which shows that it is not only state actors who engage in this “politics of prioritization” (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018; Pallister-Wilkins, 2017) but NGOs as well:
The Greeks—on the islands at least—in the beginning of the crisis they were extremely supportive... but... after a point they just had enough... In the beginning it was ‘okay, it was Syrian... refugees actually fleeing war in 2015, while now it’s an Afghani 24-year-old male’. They don’t see... the statistics... more than 60%... of refugees or asylum seekers in Greece they’re women and children... when I talk to Greeks and they say ‘yeah, yeah, but what about this Afghan male?’, I’m like ‘don’t look at him. Look at the percentages... that is someone... you should worry about’. (interview 20/3/2020, emphases in original)

Rather than rejecting the dominating hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability in this field, this volunteer incidentally reifies them by emphasizing the distinction between the “24-year-old Afghan male” and women and children, the latter whom she implies are ‘genuine refugees’. These hierarchies are further reinforced by Drop in the Ocean’s practices on the ground, with the volunteer coordinators instructing volunteers at the warehouse in Krakow to prioritize visibly ‘needy’ refugees in the distribution of a limited supply of new sneakers, which included the elderly and those with bad shoes. Apart from being subject to the discretion of each volunteer, this put volunteers in a difficult position in deciding who was more ‘vulnerable’ than others and in handing out the shoes discreetly, which often ended in confrontation with other “beneficiaries”. The free shop was also restricted to refugees from Ukraine, with thorough ID checks at the entrance. This illustrates the NGO’s perpetuation of the hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability in Frontex’s border knowledge, which banally securitizes migration and contributes to normalizing this securitization.

The care and control duality also informed Drop in the Ocean’s practices, with the NGO having several safety measures relating to its work on Lesvos and in Krakow to protect both the volunteers and the “beneficiaries”, also from each other. This included a code of conduct for how the volunteers should interact with...

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122 The quote also illustrates the normalization of crisis, with the local population on the Greek islands growing tired of the prolonged crisis brought about by the EU’s hotspot approach. Like Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2014, p. 128, emphasis added) point out, “refugee camps often end up challenging the spatiotemporal logic created by crisis labelling”, as camps acquire permanence over time, removing refugees and migrants from perceived sites of crisis but in the process becoming “sites of crisis themselves”.

123 This was the NGO’s preferred term to refer to the refugees, which the volunteers were instructed to use.

124 Frontex’s risk analysis reports also excluded Ukrainians from its statistics of “illegal-border crossings” (Frontex, 2022), thus treating it as a ‘refugee crisis’ rather than a ‘migration crisis’, in contrast to the 2015 arrivals.
the “beneficiaries”, security guidelines for how to stay safe at work, social media guidelines, and a “vulnerable persons protection policy”. On Lesvos, all volunteers were part of a WhatsApp group which was only to be used in emergency situations (such as evacuation of the camp), while in Krakow a digital check in/out shift system had been developed so that the HQ in Oslo had an overview of who were in the warehouse at all times. On Lesvos, one of the coordinators explained that for our own safety, we had to work together in teams of two (with one international volunteer and one camp resident), were not allowed to walk alone in the camp, and had to inform her if we were invited inside someone’s tent for tea, which was not unusual. Similarly, another coordinator told me that the increased police presence in the new camp made it safer for the residents than the old Moria camp, although their entry and exit was significantly restricted as a result.

Moreover, the warehouse in Krakow had multiple crowd control measures in place, with minimum one volunteer being stationed at every section in the shop to give an impression of order and control, two people outside the shop managing the queue and reporting any ‘suspicious’ behavior, and two people at the door counting how many entered and exited, so that the coordinators always knew the total number of people inside the shop. During the daily induction for new volunteers, the shop coordinators stressed the importance of preventing dangerous situations from arising, which included re-stocking clothes at a slow pace and in smaller quantities than what was needed to avoid “beneficiaries” crowding the volunteer or fighting over a new item in high demand. This involved taking detours through the shop to avoid being seen while re-stocking and not taking any personal orders from the “beneficiaries”, since that could be noticed by others and lead to confrontation. Thus, in Drop in the Ocean’s operations on Lesvos and in Krakow, refugees and migrants were treated both as “beneficiaries” of assistance and potential objects of risk, which the volunteers needed to be protected from. In addition to banally securitizing migration, this illustrates the normalization of securitization in this field, where Frontex’s inverted humanitarian logics are present among civil society actors as well.

The Scandinavian border and coast guards also reproduced Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control. The interviews revealed a ‘politics of priority’ in their work, with the Swedish coast guards emphasizing that their most difficult task during SAR operations was deciding who to rescue first since they did not always have the capacity to board everyone (interview 17/3/21). This involved evaluating the seaworthiness of the boat and the physical conditions of the people on board in order to determine whether they could wait for another rescue vessel,
With women and children being prioritized. This need to prioritize often presented itself in 2015–16 in the Central Mediterranean, as one rescue incident could involve multiple boats with hundreds of people in total, in addition to those already onboard the coast guard vessel (interview 17/3/21). Thus, in the process of saving lives at sea, the Swedish coast guards incidentally reproduced the hierarchy of vulnerability in this field due to their limited resources.

The border and coast guards also reproduced the care and control duality in Frontex’s border knowledge, describing the balance between security and protection as difficult. This is illustrated by the quote about Frontex’s SAR operations in the Aegean Sea:

The best thing was to see them on the… Turkish side, call… the Turks, to intercept them. That was the best solution… But if the migrants crossed this line on the map—that nobody could see on the water—then you would not accept the Turks to cross it… And then two minutes before you were calling on the radio ‘more to the left… no, no, there, there!’ , but it crossed the line two minutes later, so ‘stay away, now it’s ours’. And then you go to the migrants… and then you sail them to Kos. (interview 4/3/2020, emphases in original)

This border guard refers to pullbacks as the best way to save lives at sea, thus reproducing the inverted humanitarian logics in Frontex’s border knowledge. He believed that the ideal would be to prevent people from getting on the boats in the first place, which has been a mantra among European policymakers after the 2015 ‘crisis’. The quote thus illustrates securitization’s normalization in this field, which the different actors contribute to in banal ways. The “paradox of protection” (Bigo, 2006; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) is also reflected in this Swedish coast guard’s description of the dual objective of border patrols:

So it’s a combination of everything. You want to save lives of course… You want to make sure that those who want to come to Europe can come here in a… dignified and safe way. And then of course we want to catch those who… make a lot of money from smuggling… or exploiting people’s… vulnerability and life situation. (interview 8/3/21, emphases added)

This quote illustrates both how the coast guards try to balance these different tasks and how refugees and migrants are seen as vulnerable at the hands of

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125 This is also illustrated by Italy’s recent practice of “selective disembarkation” of vulnerable groups (ECRE, 2022).
exploitative smugglers, here being ‘at risk’ rather than ‘a risk’ (cf. Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). The perception of a trade-off between security and protection was not shared by the ODIHR official on Frontex’s Consultative Forum, who rather saw them as two sides of the same coin:

There shouldn’t be, I mean this is what… certain countries perceive, but the reality is that… there is no contradiction between promoting human rights and effectively monitoring, protecting borders. It says more about what is border… management really being used as a cover-up for, which is having an exclusionary, restrictive immigration policy. So… it’s not about security issues, it’s not a security threat. It’s about wanting to keep people out… This is… our role to… try to advise participating states that… they don’t have to choose between security and human rights… those can go hand in hand, and show how this can be done… Trying to advance human rights within… a context that is focused on security. (interview 5/2/2020, emphases added)

Similarly, one of the Swedish coast guards emphasized the complementarity of border patrol and SAR, explaining how they went to the Mediterranean with instructions to do the former but quickly ended up doing the latter instead:

It goes a little hand in hand… much of this border patrol became sea rescue. And because it is border patrol, you have to guide the migrants safely – everyone has the right to apply for asylum – so you have to take them to a country where they have the opportunity to apply for asylum, a safe haven… [I]n 2015 there was a lot of sea rescue, we had the police with us and we had health personnel… But… it was often the case that we came to the area where Frontex wanted border patrol and it immediately turned into sea rescue. (interview 17/3/21, emphases added)

Although this interviewee discursively resists securitization by emphasizing the right to asylum, the care and control duality is still present in the operations, which have both police and health care personnel onboard, with the refugees and migrants perceived as a potential risk to both the crew and Europe at large while also at risk of dehydration or hypothermia. This sub-section has thus illustrated how Drop in the Ocean and the border guards incidentally reproduce the care and control duality promulgated by Frontex, by treating refugees and migrants as both an object of risk and a vulnerable subject through their control and protection-oriented practices. The emphasis on care allows them to ‘ignore and forget’ (cf. Billig, 1995) their own banal securitization, which is incorporated in the logics
of their routine practices (see Bigo, 2002). These actors hence end up reproducing banal securitization through their “routine absent-mindedness, in not noticing unwaved flags” (Billig 1995, p. 50, emphasis added) but only explicit manifestations of securitization that belong to others.

The Normalization of Non-Rescue and Push and Pullbacks

Frankly, I don’t think border management is going to be resolved until asylum is resolved. They go hand in hand and… this is the dichotomy of the policy, you know. They think ‘oh, border management’ now, but then what about asylum? And when asylum is better managed then border management will be subsequently better managed. (interview 12/4/2021, emphasis in original)

This sub-section examines how the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials banally securitize migration and contribute to its normalization by normalizing non-rescue and push and pullbacks. Just like Frontex’s risk analysis reports, they do so by framing SAR as a dangerous pull-factor and conversely non-rescue and push and pullbacks as saving lives. 126 This illustrates securitization’s normalization in this field, where these actors (un)consciously reproduce Frontex’s inverted humanitarian border control, contributing to making it part of hegemonic ‘common sense’ (Fairclough, 2015) in this field. The first part focuses on how push and pullbacks are normalized by the Frontex Management Board’s investigative report of the 2020 pushback allegations in the Aegean Sea (Waters et al., 2020) and resistance by the European Parliament’s LIBE Committee Frontex Scrutiny Group. The second part focuses on the interviewees’ normalization of non-rescue. The empirical material consists of the interviews, the scrutiny group’s public hearings in the spring of 2021, its final report, and the Management Board’s report.

Normalizing Push and Pullbacks

As mentioned in the introduction, concomitant with Frontex’s growth has been critique of both fundamental rights violations (Barigazzi, 2021b) and mismanagement (Christides et al., 2021), with investigations by EU bodies such as the European Ombudsman (2013, 2020), the anti-fraud office (OLAF), the European Court of Auditors (ECA, 2021), the European Parliament (2020b), and DG Migration and Home Affairs (European Commission, 2020d). This reached

126 See Keady-Tabbal and Mann (2022, p. 61) for how Greek life rafts are transformed from “life-saving materials into life-threatening ones” in the Aegean Sea.
a boiling point in 2020 with the publicized pushback allegations against Frontex in the Aegean Sea, which culminated in the resignation of the Executive Director in 2022 after an OLAF investigation revealed Frontex’s awareness of these (Barigazzi & Lynch, 2022; Christides & Lüdke, 2022).

Following these allegations, the European Parliament’s LIBE committee established the Frontex Scrutiny Group to “permanently monitor all aspects of the functioning of Frontex, including its reinforced role and resources for integrated border management, [and] the correct application of the EU acquis”, especially its 2019 regulation and the 2014 sea borders regulation (European Parliament, 2021k, p. 2, emphases added; Greens/EFA, 2021). During its three months fact-finding investigation, the scrutiny group arranged a series of public hearings with representatives from the Commission, member states’ border and coast guard authorities, Frontex’s Management Board, the Consultative Forum, the Executive Director, the Fundamental Rights Officer, the EU Ombudsman, FRA, civil society organizations, the investigative journalists behind the allegations, and legal experts (see European Parliament, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021g, 2021h, 2021i). While the scrutiny group’s final report criticizes Frontex for lack of fundamental rights safeguards in its operations (European Parliament, 2021k), the Management Board’s report from its own investigation refutes Frontex’s involvement in pushbacks (Frontex, 2021f) by deploying a narrow interpretation of the principle of non-refoulement which obscures the right to asylum (see also Glouftsios, 2023a, 2023b).

In 7 out of the 13 investigated incidents, the Frontex Management Board’s report concludes that “the migrant boats either altered their course on their own initiative or by intervention of the Turkish Coast Guard and therefore never reached Greek Territorial Waters” (Frontex, 2021f, p. 30, emphases added) – the latter which constitutes de facto pullbacks. In the 6 remaining incidents, which took place in Greek territorial waters, the report notes that either: the migrant boats turned back to Turkish territorial waters “due to border control measures by the Hellenic Coast Guard”; that “no desire for asylum had been expressed by the migrants”; or that “the special situation at sea and the behaviour of the migrants did not allow border police questionings and that an opportunity to apply for asylum was therefore not possible” (Frontex, 2021f, p. 31, emphases added). The discursive practice of obscuring is evident here, with the report shrouding the fact that these controls effectively pushed and/or pulled refugees and migrants back, focusing instead on their ‘risky’ behavior. Securitization and the difficult operational context at sea thus serve to normalize push and pullbacks, as the following quote illustrates:
It is the common legal understanding of the Working Group members that not every detected boat with migrants on board automatically qualifies as a distress case… the concrete circumstances of each case (in particular the weather… state of the boat, the number of people that the boat is carrying etc.) need to be taken into account. In addition, not every detected attempt of illegal border crossing… can automatically be considered as an asylum case… If the migrants claim for asylum, the necessary measures should be done back on the territory of the Host Member State. This Working Group fully acknowledges the special circumstances – such as factors at sea… and hybrid… threats as… indicated by Frontex strategic risk analysis – influencing the actions of the responsible officers in each… case. In addition, the volatile behaviour of the facilitators and the migrants… needs to be borne in mind... At the Greek/Turkish maritime border, the behaviour of the Turkish border authorities must also be taken into account. (Frontex, 2021f, p. 30, emphases added)

The report’s recommendations contradict its findings, however, emphasizing the need for an individual assessment of asylum claims on member states’ territory, whereas in five of the reported incidents in Greek territorial waters this did not happen due to Greek border controls. The Swedish coast guards’ accounts also contradict the Management Board’s assertion that not all migrant boats at sea are “automatically” in distress, underlining that due to the poor quality of the boats and the long distances in the Mediterranean most of them would not have made it (interviews 15/3/21, 17/3/21).¹²⁷ This again illustrates discursive resistance towards securitization among border guards seconded to Frontex operations, which indicates that it is not wholly normalized in EUropean external(ized) border control.

Drawing on a humanitarian discourse, the Management Board’s report nevertheless contends that “the presence of the European Border and Coast Guard is a safeguard for humanity and has a preventive dimension” (Frontex, 2021f, p. 32, emphases added), illustrating the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field. Frontex’s Consultative Forum has for years called for Frontex to withdraw from Hungary to prevent its officers from contributing to fundamental rights violations (interviews 5/2/2020, 11/3/2020), while Frontex’s response has been the contrary: that its presence helps prevent these violations (European Parliament, 2021c, 2021i; interview 6/7/2021). This sentiment was

¹²⁷ This is in addition to the lack of life vests, food, water, qualified crew, and facilities, as per the definition of “distress” in the 2014 sea borders regulation (Regulation (EU) No. 656/2014).
shared by the border and coast guards (interviews 2/3/21, 8/3/21, 15/3/21, 17/3/21), which illustrates the **normalization** of inverted humanitarian border control in this field.

The Management Board’s report further normalizes pushbacks by referring to the judgement by the EctHR (2020) in N.D. and N.T. v. Spain to justify collective expulsions if refugees and migrants “seek to cross the border illegally… in large numbers and in a violent manner” (Frontex, 2021f, p. 33, emphases added), despite the Consultative Forum advising that legal means of entry are limited at the sea borders (Frontex Consultative Forum, 2021). Securitization’s **institutionalization** (Buzan et al., 1998) within Frontex is illustrated by the scrutiny group’s finding that border guards are discouraged from filing serious incident reports (SIR) relating to fundamental rights from operations (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k) and that they are categorized in a such way that the Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) does not get to see them (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k).128 The former was corroborated by the Swedish coast guards, who were critical of it (interview 2/3/21). The scrutiny group’s final report criticizes not only Frontex and the Management Board’s lack of response to the pushback allegations but also their lack of **prevention** of fundamental rights abuses, calling on member states to step up their role in the latter (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k). Although it found no definitive evidence regarding Frontex’s involvement in the pushbacks in the Aegean Sea, it concludes that:

> The agency found evidence in support of allegations of fundamental rights violations in Member States with which it had a joint operation, but failed to address and follow-up on these violations… As a result, Frontex did not prevent these violations, nor reduced the risk of future fundamental rights violations. (European Parliament, 2021k, p. 5, emphases added)

The Frontex Scrutiny Group’s findings illustrate how Frontex indirectly contributes to the **normalization** of pushbacks in this field by acquiescing to these practices in the contexts in which it operates. The scrutiny group questioned Frontex’s blanket acceptance of the Greek government’s denial of pushbacks despite reports by civil society actors and journalists, calling for Frontex to take a more active stance in promoting fundamental rights vis-à-vis member states and

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128 See Glouftsios (2023a) for the SIR mechanism as a “device of dis/appearance”; and Bachiller López and Keady-Tabbal (2021) on the role of Frontex’s reporting system (JORA) in obscuring the right to apply for asylum and the duty to assist at sea in the Aegean, where migrant vessels are categorically not reported as in distress.
only launch joint operations if it is given full access to all operational areas so that it can monitor violations itself (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k). Illustrating Frontex’s obscuring of fundamental rights, the scrutiny group also found that the FRO and the Consultative Forum’s (CF) recommendations have been sidelined by the Executive Director for years, recommending that they should be included at an earlier stage in the planning of joint operations (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k). My interviews with the FRO official and CF members echoed this, emphasizing difficulties in getting adequate and timely access to information from Frontex, along with their own limited resources (interviews 5/2/20, 11/3/20, 4/12/20, 12/4/21; see also European Parliament, 2021h).130

This indicates a normalization of securitization within Frontex, which is further illustrated by the scrutiny group’s finding of a general lack of fundamental rights expertise across Frontex’s divisions, especially in the Risk Analysis and Vulnerability Assessment units (European Parliament, 2021a, 2021k), which are the ones providing the analyses which decisions to launch operations are taken upon. The LIBE committee’s Frontex Scrutiny Group thus uncovered an internal ‘fundamental rights crisis’ within Frontex,131 with the former Executive Director conceding that Frontex struggled with finding the balance between effectively protecting the external border and upholding fundamental rights, with the Management Board even asking the Commission to clarify how Frontex should operate to be in respect of the Schengen Borders Code (SBC), the sea borders regulation, and the CEAS (European Parliament, 2021i).

Nevertheless, when asked by the Greens during a hearing about how Frontex ensures access to asylum at sea, Leggeri’s response was that this cannot be ensured due to “legal and operational complexities” of maritime operations, emphasizing that asylum-seekers should present themselves at official border crossing points instead (European Parliament, 2021i) – leaving out the issue of how they should get there in the first place. This illustrates Frontex’s normalization of push and pullbacks, which is enabled by its routine obscuring

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129 The FRO official emphasized that prevention of fundamental rights violations had been the office’s priority from the start, but that the Executive Director did not share that view (interview 12/4/21).

130 The scrutiny group similarly emphasized that Frontex’s strict confidentiality policy hampered the European Parliament’s ability to exercise democratic control over it, despite Frontex being accountable to the Parliament (European Parliament, 2021k, p. 16).

131 As Fjørtoft (2022, p. 561, emphasis added) points out, “Frontex does not only manage external migration risks, it also manages its own institutional risks of (losing) legitimacy, of organizational failure, and of accountability pressures”.

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of fundamental rights (see Keady-Tabbal and Mann, 2022, for the “normalisation of abandonment” at the external border). This is further demonstrated by the FRO official’s account that in the office’s first years they had to work to convince Frontex officials that asylum is relevant to their work and that pushbacks are not simply an “NGO term” (interview 12/4/21; see Glouftsios, 2023b, for Frontex’s attempts during the hearings to question the illegality of pushbacks in order to evade responsibility). The 2020 pushback allegations and the Frontex Scrutiny Group’s hearings in its wake thus reveal a discursive struggle (Fairclough, 2015) in this field not only about what constitutes SAR and push and pullbacks but border control as such, which is illustrated by the quote from the DG Home official working on Schengen and external borders:

Yeah that is the big discussion… there are many people who basically say that border guards should just be going there and picking up the boats and bringing everyone in, but this is not border surveillance… you can think that this is how it should be- that is an issue of opinion- but this is not what is written in the law… [O]ur interpretation… is that it is for the captain of the ship… to decide… ‘is this a boat… that can drive on its own, is everyone onboard okay, are the weather conditions such that they can stay on this boat, or is there a danger that something is going to happen?’… But the thing is not everyone… necessarily does ask for asylum… of course there are people there in the boat whose business it is to bring these people over, and this business is illegal. So sometimes indeed having that boat that is coming towards European waters, once they see the border guards, they turn around and leave without entering European waters (interview 15/4/2021, emphases in original)

Similar as in Frontex’s border knowledge, the discursive practice of obscuring is evident here, with the DG Home official stressing that this mode of entry is “illegal” despite the 1951 Refugee Convention’s specification that refugees should not be penalized for their “illegal” entry. As Glouftsios (2023b, p. 17, emphases added) points out, during the LIBE committee’s public hearings Frontex did not only reject complicity in the pushbacks in the Aegean Sea but also whether these took place and if pushbacks are illegal:

The case of the pushbacks scandal does not only expose the limitations of accountability… but showcases… the tactical management of what comes to be visible and knowable through reporting procedures, as well as the creation of ambiguity and confusion about the (il)legality of the practices being investigated…
[D]ebating evidence and giving an account can always entail silence, concealment, denial, hiding and obfuscation.

This reveals not only an accountability deficit (Pallister-Wilkins, 2011) in this field but a paradox as well, where Frontex enjoys impunity for its actions while refugees, migrants, and civil society actors are conversely criminalized (see CoE, 2023a; FRA, 2014; Mainwaring & DeBono, 2021; Lawlor, 2023; PICUM, 2023; van Liempt, 2021; Vosyliute & Conte, 2019). As this sub-section has shown, Frontex’s normalization of push and pullbacks contributes to normalizing inverted humanitarian border control in this field and securitized responses to irregularized migration.

**Normalizing Non-Rescue**

Closely related to the normalization of push and pullbacks is the normalization of non-rescue. The discursive practice of inversion is key here, with the following examining how the border guards and Frontex officials frame SAR as life-threatening rather than life-saving. Mirroring the depiction of SAR in Frontex’s border knowledge, this indicates the normalization of inverted humanitarian border control in this field, which the interviewees (in)advertently reproduce through their accounts. The perception of SAR as a pull-factor is illustrated in the quote by a Frontex official about the modus operandi of smugglers:

> If our vessels or NGO vessels are close by they put people at high risk in small... Chinese inflatable boats that are not seaworthy. They give them the fake life jackets- really fake life jackets. If they know we are further away they give them a satellite phone, but if we are close by the satellite phone is a big cost, so they will not give it... there are constant adjustments by the criminal organizations. The adjustments are made according to what we do and what we don’t do... They are extremely creative. (interview 23/6/21, emphases in original) 133

132 Whereas Alice’s discussions in Wonderland are never resolved, neither are the discursive struggles in this field about the definition of push and pullbacks and who is responsible for refugees and migrants dying while trying to cross the external(ized) border. While not as disorienting as Alice’s conversation with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, the subject of discussion in the Frontex Scrutiny Group’s hearings were always the same: about the fundamentals of this field, whether that concerns whether you can behead a cat without a body (Carroll, 1865/1998, pp. 76–77) or if it can be presumed that all migrant vessels have legitimate protection needs.

133 This quote resonates with Bigo’s (2014) findings that border guards rationalize their work as both patrolling and protecting refugees and migrants from exploitative smugglers. See also his “practices of indifference” (Bigo, 2014, p. 212).
Here we see how the Frontex official portrays SAR as leading to more deaths at sea rather than less due to smugglers’ adaption to it. This discursive inversion justifies non-rescue since according to this logic that becomes more humanitarian than rescue itself. The pull-factor hypothesis, which undergirds the logic of non-rescue, thus allows Frontex to limit the geographical scope of SAR, which is illustrated by its shrinking operational area in the Central Mediterranean. The Swedish coast guards also emphasized what they saw as unintended consequences of SAR:

It’s great that you save lives… but the tragedy of it all is… that the smugglers knew we were going to save people… So they sent people out in sub-standard boats because they knew we were going to save them. And as long as we were there and rescued people, the boats got worse and worse… so it’s a bit double-sided, we were part of the chain, so to speak. Had we not been there… then no one would have saved all these refugees who came, then there would have been no basis for the smugglers to smuggle… Or maybe some time would have passed and a lot of people would have died. Then no one would have wanted to go that way… [Y]ou never get them that way… but you cannot say ‘no’ either, it is about human rights in the end. (interview 15/3/21, emphases added)

This quote illustrates the framing of SAR as a double-edged sword: rescuing some in the present while risking more lives in the future, a logic which rationalizes non-rescue since it saves more lives in total. The portrayal of reckless smugglers play an important role in this, as seen also in Frontex’s risk analysis reports. Evidence of the counterproductive effects of EUrope’s efforts to ‘tackle the business model of smugglers’ abound, however, with Andersson (2014, 2016) pointing to the growth of an “illegality industry” at the external(ized) border because of restrictive migration policies and border controls, which grows with each new crisis (see also Düvell, 2011). This cycle becomes difficult to break, resulting in a ‘securitization paradox’ where more security practices inversely leads to less security for both borders and humans. The self-perpetuating cycle of securitization thus becomes difficult to break and has no clear winners, requiring

134 Forensic Architecture (2016) visualizes this development over time, showing how the area patrolled by the Italian navy operation Mare Nostrum in 2013–14 diminished when being replaced by Frontex’s Operation Triton, which did not patrol the then undeclared Libyan SAR region or large parts of Malta’s SAR region despite most shipwrecks taking place there. The subsequent Operation Themis reduced the operational area even further due to the EU and member states’ concern that SAR constitutes a pull-factor (interviews 9/12/20, 23/6/2021).
an ever-expanding amount of funds and resources to maintain (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018).

A perverse effect of inverted humanitarian border control is therefore that it *endangers* the lives of its objects of concern rather than protects them. This is epitomized by Frontex and EUNAVFOR MED’s systematic destruction of migrant boats seized to prevent them from being reused, which rather than hampering smuggling has incentivized the use of cheaper and less robust inflatable dinghies which put refugees and migrants even *more* at risk (interviews 4/3/20, 23/6/21, 15/3/21, 17/3/21; see also Cuttitta, 2019). The focus on catching smugglers has therefore fuelled the need for SAR rather than decreased it, while at the same time allowing border guards and Frontex officials to claim that they save lives by engaging in non-rescue. The Danish police officer even had a name for the pull-factor hypothesis:

We now talk about the- we call it the ‘Italian coast guard experience’… and they put this area *north* of Libya… and the whole experience, what you say, is that *before* the migrant boats had to make it the *whole* way across the Mediterranean Sea. Now the boats only have to be good enough to get out of the area… and be picked up by the Italian… coast guard. (interview 4/3/2020, emphases in original)

Despite research debunking the pull-factor effect of SAR (see Cusumano & Villa, 2019; Rodriguez Sánchez, 2023), this discursive inversion of SAR as *risking lives* rather than saving them informs practices on the ground, prompting the removal of naval assets from EUNAVFOR MED in 2020 to placate member states’ fears that they ‘pull’ refugees and migrants (Operation Irini, 2020). This operation encapsulates the care and control duality (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) in inverted humanitarian border control, with its dual objective of catching smugglers *and* saving lives. EUNAVFOR MED’s humanitarian framing is also evident in its name change, with then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, naming it *Operation Sophia* after a woman who was rescued and gave birth onboard to a girl named Sophia (Operation Sophia, 2018). Nevertheless, the re-purposed Operation Irini limited the operational area and shifted it away from known migrant routes in order to avoid SAR (Council, 2020; ECRE, 2020a; interview 9/12/20; Operation Irini, 2020) – illustrating the *normalization* of non-rescue in this field.

The operation will keep training the Libyan coast guard, which has been responsible for interceptions off the Libyan coast since the establishment of the
Libyan SAR region in 2018, with the help of Italy (see Mainwaring, 2019). Vessels saving refugees and migrants in distress in this zone have since been required to contact the Libyan coast guard, which will take them back to Libya, despite the UNHCR and IOM declaring Libya an unsafe port (UNHCR, 2019c). This includes Frontex, which has increasingly been relying on aerial surveillance in its cooperation with the Libyan coast guard, which civil society actors have termed “refoulement by proxy” (HRW, 2022; see also Frontex Consultative Forum, 2023). Conversely, the Frontex official in the Situational Awareness and Monitoring Division argued that if Frontex and CSDP operations did not cooperate with the Libyan coast guard, even more lives would have been lost at sea:

Later we had the regulation 2016 which allowed us with Eurosur to work in what was called the ‘pre-frontier’ area. And… that’s why I’m a bit frustrated when NGOs are always criticizing us, that they don’t see what we have accomplished here. We… are sending airplanes in areas close to North Africa, where nobody else has presence… Our airplanes… drones, are detecting… small boats with migrants, and as a result we were informing the SAR coordination centers- Malta, Italy, but also Tunisia, Libya- whoever… and they could save these people. NGOs are criticizing us that people are dying at sea, but my response to this is the contrary: if we would not be doing what we are doing, then more people would die. (interview 23/6/2021, emphases in original)

Here the discursive practice of obscuring is evident, with the Frontex official legitimizing the expansion of border controls beyond Europe’s external border in order to save lives, despite this entailing that refugees and migrants are sent back to what has been described as inhumane conditions in EU-funded Libyan detention centers (HRW, 2022; Jones, 2020; UNHCR, 2019c). The inversion of SAR thus normalizes both non-rescue and push and pullbacks at the external(ized) border, which is illustrated by their proliferation along Europe’s

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135 Both the Portuguese naval officer seconded to EUNAVFOR MED and the Swedish coast guards seconded to Operation Triton questioned the competences of the Libyan coast guard, stressing that they were warned to stay away from them since they had threatened to fire at anyone coming too close to Libyan territorial waters (interviews 9/12/20, 15/3/21, 17/3/21).

136 Which is in contravention of the law of the seas (see annexe to the 1979 SAR Convention, 1.3.2).

137 Frontex has also been accused of delaying rescue by notifying the Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Center (MRCC) rather than nearby commercial ships and NGO vessels (European Parliament, 2021f). See Stierl (2023) for Europe’s “weaponization of time”, decelerating rescue while accelerating interceptions.
perimeter (see e.g., AlarmPhone, 2020; Benjamin, 2022; Brzozowski, 2021; BVMN, 2020; CoE, 2023b; Heller, 2022).  

Aegean Boat Report lists more than 300 pushbacks conducted by the Greek coast guard in the Aegean Sea in 2020 alone, involving almost 10,000 refugees and migrants (Aegean Boat Report, 2020b). This includes the “drift back”, by using the wind and tide, of 187 inflatable life rafts carrying more than 3000 people from Greek to Turkish waters (Aegean Boat Report, 2020b; see Keady-Tabbal & Mann, 2022, for the “weaponization” of rescue infrastructure). The NGO’s statistics reveal an even high number of pullbacks by the Turkish coast guard, with more boats being stopped than arriving in Greece between 2017–21, with 125,638 refugees and migrants arriving versus 191,392 being stopped (Aegean Boat Report, 2021). While almost 10,000 arrived to the Greek islands in 2020, 25,000 were stopped by the Turkish coast guard and 10,000 were pushed back by the Greek coast guard (Aegean Boat Report, 2020a), which means that out of the 45,000 people attempting to cross the Aegean Sea that year, less than a quarter made it, excluding those who died trying. A key characteristic of inverted humanitarian border control in this field is thus the systematization of violence at the external(ized) border, where SAR NGOs are criminalized for “rescuing too many people” (Louise Michel, 2022, para. 1) while non-rescue and push and pullbacks are implicitly condoned.

The fact that non-rescue and push and pullbacks are framed as saving lives in this field means that we should not lose sight of “the connection between border policies and border deaths”, since presenting the latter as “natural”, “accidental”, or a result of criminal activities diverts “attention from the… indirect impact of migration and border policies on migrant mortality” (Cuttitta, 2019, pp. 11–12, emphases added). As this wider section has shown, the actors in this field contribute to the normalization of inverted humanitarian border control through

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138 Fitzgerald (2019) points out that similar deterrence efforts targeted Jews in the interwar period, with Western states’ guilt after the Holocaust giving rise to the modern asylum regime.

139 Out of all the pushbacks conducted by the Greek coast guard in 2020, one third had already arrived on a Greek island before being summarily returned, and almost half of the pushbacks that year were from Lesvos (Aegean Boat Report, 2020a). Although publicly denouncing pushbacks, the EU has sought to institutionalize them through the Commission’s proposed crisis and force majeure regulation, which allows for derogations from the CEAS in cases of “instrumentalization” of refugees and migrants by third countries (European Commission, 2021a; UNHCR, 2022b; Woollard, 2022).

140 Billaud and De Lauri (2016, p. 58) highlight the “deceptive potential of humanitarianism and its capacity to produce and shape social imaginaries with great persuasive power”, with the false “narrative of normality” promised by humanitarian interventions producing immobility, confinement, and entrapment.
their routine reproduction of the care and control duality and tacit normalization of non-rescue and push and pullbacks. This, in turn, furthers the securitization of migration and its normalization in European external(ized) border control. Contrary to the EU’s proclamations of fundamental rights, in this field it has contributed to their erosion, in the words of the SOS Mediterranee interviewee:

But the hotspot approach didn’t work. The... EU-Turkey deal was a failure... the day it was signed... because it’s... a bargain on people’s lives, and at that time I was working in Syria, and I knew that they were actually sending back people deliberately... [B]ut the problem is that it’s now the EU that has undermined... the Refugee Convention in the world, and it has created a precedence where in Lebanon or Kenya, which are two countries hosting... a very important share of refugees, and now are saying ‘well, if the EU itself is not respecting human rights and the Refugee Convention, why the hell should we?’ (interview 7/5/2020, emphases in original)141

The notion of border control being humanitarian turns out to be as fictitious as Alice’s dream worlds, instead leading to a routinization of violence at Europe’s borders.

**Resisting and Reproducing Crises**

Now that we have examined how actors in this field (un)knowingly contribute to the securitization of migration and its normalization by (de)politicizing border control, shifting blame, and normalizing inverted humanitarian border control, this last section turns to how civil society actors do so by resisting and reproducing crises. The interviews and fieldwork comprise the empirical material for this section, which examines how these actors discursively resist securitization and the crisis discourse that envelopes it but nonetheless reproduce both through their control and emergency-oriented practices. This indicates that securitization is largely normalized in this field, where even civil society actors working for refugees and migrants’ rights end up furthering it.

141 EUropean lack of solidarity towards refugees is not new, however. The second world war brought to light the lack of solidarity among European states for the Jews who were unable to escape Nazi Germany and were subsequently killed in the Holocaust (see Orchard, 2018; Torpey, 2018). Parallels can be drawn between the failed Evian conference organized by the international community in 1938 to deal with the Jewish refugees and the failure of EUropean member states in 2015–16 to agree on responsibility sharing in the wake of the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ (see also Hellström, Norocel & Jørgensen, 2020).
Resisting Crises

While sharing a skepticism towards Frontex and EUropean policymakers’ framing of the 2015 arrivals as a ‘security crisis’, the civil society actors differed in their views of whether there was a crisis at all, what type of crisis it was, and whether it is over. The IOM official from the Missing Migrants project described the death toll at the external(ized) border as a “humanitarian crisis” caused by policy failure:

There’s also this issue… that people are still dying before they cross the Mediterranean as well. And this whole issue of… invisible shipwrecks, where people just die without a trace because there’s no one… tasked with search and rescue anymore… [W]hen I started on this project, it was the height of this crisis on the Eastern Mediterranean, and… we saw the most large shipwrecks around that time. But you know, these shipwrecks continue… [P]rior to the early 2000s there were almost no deaths in the Mediterranean, so… any deaths is a… policy failure… [I]t has always been the Central Mediterranean crossing… from Libya to Italy, that has claimed the most lives, simply because it’s the longest route, we know that the smuggling conditions leaving Libya are often really dangerous… which is… really a humanitarian crisis obviously for those who die, those who witness it, but also… potentially tens- if not hundreds of thousands of family members who have no idea what’s happened to these people. (interview 30/1/20, emphases added)

This quote illustrates the IOM official’s rejection of the framing of the 2015 arrivals as a ‘security crisis’, emphasizing instead its human costs. Contrary to Frontex’s obscuring of the role of policies in conducing border deaths and its limited spatiotemporal framing of the ‘crisis’, the interviewee points out that many refugees and migrants die before even reaching the external border and that these deaths continue after 2015 (see also Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins, 2014). However, by arguing that the crisis is not over she inadvertently contributes to normalizing crises at the external(ized) border, similar to Frontex’s border knowledge. Later on, she herself by rejecting the framing of the 2015 arrivals as a ‘crisis’ at all:

142 Referred to as EUrope’s “missing migrants crisis”, Okeowo (2023) argues that the same databases that are used to track secondary movements (e.g., Eurodac) can be used to identify recovered bodies at sea. The fact that they are only used for the former illustrates the normalization of securitization in this field.

143 As Cuttitta (2019) points out, a paradoxical consequence of the increased focus on border deaths is that it fuels the crisis discourse, being used to justify short-term, exceptional policies and practices.
This issue around securitization of European borders, I think it’s just a *weird misconception*... of the data that is presented... [T]he data on irregular arrivals in the Mediterranean is *far more* available than regular arrivals... You also have people who become irregularized by overstaying their visas, and statistically this makes up a much bigger proportion of the irregular migrants than... the people coming by boats and risking their lives... For me this idea that there was a *crisis* was not really true. (interview 30/1/20, emphases added)

The interviewee from SOS Mediterranee also resisted the security framing of the 2015 arrivals, describing 2015 as a “reception crisis” caused by a lack of political will among member states:

> It’s not a question- it has never been a refugee crisis... in Europe, it has been a *reception crisis*, and it’s a political willingness crisis rather than anything else... it’s just showing how dysfunctional the EU is... And that’s why it took... so much scope... that it shouldn’t have taken if the systems that are already in place were functional. (interview 7/5/2020, emphases in original)

Rather than emphasizing the role of border controls in exacerbating the ‘crisis’, she stresses the role of migration policies once refugees and migrants have made it to Europe, mirroring the widespread critique of the Dublin regulation and lack of solidarity between member states in 2015 (Collett & Le Coz, 2018; Lavenex, 2018; Niemann & Zaun, 2017). The perception of the 2015 ‘crisis’ as being politically manufactured was echoed by one of the Samos Volunteers interviewees, referring to the situation in the Greek hotspots:

> It’s just getting out of hand that it’s all *political decisions*, I think that’s the most painful part of it all- 7000 people here, the 20,000 people on Lesvos... It doesn’t have to be this *extreme* as it is now... [A]nd... that the general reaction of the other European countries was ‘oh Greece... you’re protecting the borders of Europe’, we’re talking about human beings, they’re not animals coming... to take over. And I think... it’s just creating even more fear, the way people talk about it, the way it’s been shown in the media (interview 19/5/20, emphases added)\(^{144}\)

\(^{144}\) See Mountz (2020) for the growth of remote detention centers on islands as an instrument of border policing by Western states, which will bring about the “death of asylum”. See also Wodak (2020) for the use of dehumanizing comparisons in right-wing discourse.

in order to save lives in the here and now rather than focusing on long-term solutions such as creating more safe and legal channels.

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Whereas this interviewee explicitly challenges the securitized framing of migration, her colleague questioned whether the 2015 ‘crisis’ is over, despite the EU’s proclamations (see Fox, 2019):

No, it was never over… they were just trying to hide it in Turkey, like ‘okay, give Turkey lots of money and keep refugees there’. And that was always… a short-term fix, because now there’s millions of people in Turkey, they all have a really low standard of living, they’re suffering abuse… Turkey can’t deal with that- the influx of people. And then they pass it on to Greece, and then Greece is in the same situation, they’re struggling. The Greeks are fed up. So it’s just passing the problem on… I don’t think it was ever over, I think it was just the EU wanted it to be that way. (interview 13/3/20, emphases added)

This quote challenges the limited temporality of Europe’s framing of the 2015 ‘crisis’ and highlights its discursive construction, being declared “over” despite the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Greek hotspots. This account is contrasted by the FRA official, who argued that the declining number of arrivals prove that the crisis is over:

The figures clearly show that… there’s no crisis any longer, from 2016 the arrivals dropped and now the figures are much less, but the crisis mode… continues to live in people’s and decision-makers’ minds. So… this is the psychological… problem… Decision-makers act as if we lived in a crisis, but also it’s part of the narrative… in government communication towards the population in a number of countries… which makes it harder to have an evidence-based and fact-based discussion. It’s so emotional and… impression-based… everyone has a say on migration, it’s like football, I don’t know why everyone is an expert on that. And because of all those… unnecessary layers- making it super subjective, it’s hard to bring it back to an objective level and to… discuss and shape policies… It’s super politicized. (interview 4/6/2020, emphases in original)

This numerical perception of crisis mirrors that in Frontex’s border knowledge, although the interviewee uses these numbers to reject the normalization of crisis in this field, which according to him is enabled by its politicization. This sub-section has thus illustrated how civil society actors discursively reject the

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145 McNevin (2014, p. 302, emphases added) argues that “islands are increasingly sites of sovereign experimentation in which territories, borders, and jurisdictions that trigger legal obligations to migrants of different kinds are deliberately rendered ambiguous”.
securitized crisis discourse in this field, which indicates a certain level of resistance to the securitization of migration (see Figure 5). The following subsection complicates this picture, however.

**Reproducing Crises**

Although the interviews with civil society actors revealed more resistance towards securitization and the crisis discourse than the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials, they nevertheless reproduced both through their control and emergency-oriented practices. This is illustrated by IOM’s large-scale data gathering on migration in Africa and its use by European states for their migration and border control priorities, similar to Frontex’s risk analyses. According to the IOM officials working with the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), data collection on mobility patterns in Africa has become a goal in itself, without having a clearly defined purpose:

The gathering of too much data is definitely… a problem among… every organization… in the humanitarian development sector… I think we justify our lack of action by our lack of data, and it has become more and more like that… our objectives now have become to collect data… that’s a problem. The objective should be to use the data for something… because of transparency, because money is coming from taxpayers… we need to find probably a middle ground of how much data do we need to act. Just in West and Central Africa on migration in the last three years… you’ve had… IOM, UNHCR collecting data… the Danish Refugee Council…. Save the Children is doing something, UNICEF… The amount of money spent on doing data collection is ridiculous, and I think that’s where we need to…. Draw a line at some point, where the donors also need to coordinate among themselves… so that you don’t have ECHO EU giving somewhere and DFID giving somewhere else. (interview 27/5/2020, emphases in original)

Here we see how the IOM banally securitizes migration through its indiscriminate data gathering on cross-border movements in Africa and towards Europe, which is funded by the EU and member states who use this information for their migration and border control activities in these countries. The quote illustrates

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146 The AlarmPhone Sahara representative was critical of IOM’s assisted voluntary return (AVR) program in Niger, where they operate a camp on the border with Algeria where only those agreeing to return to their country of origin get shelter and assistance. The others, who are pushed back by Algerian border guards, are left to their own devices in the middle of the Sahara Desert (interview 12/3/20).
Bigo’s (2002, p. 83) observation that even when civil society actors intervene in securitizing processes, “they can do so only by turning professional, by producing this kind of [administrative] knowledge”. It also indicates securitization’s normalization in this field, where even international organizations working for refugees and migrants’ rights are unable to escape its reach. This is further illustrated by the IOM official’s reflections on the rationale for this data gathering:

Especially on the flow monitoring side of DTM everything related to migration is so new that… we still have to kind of rethink the reason why we’re really doing that. Especially because it… started… with these movements to Europe, and so a lot of the data collection was defined as such, with this kind of view… And now that we’re seeing reductions in movements to Europe- especially from West and Central Africa… we… need to redefine why we’re doing that and the use of the data… The first clear use was for the EU and partners to… identify hotspots of migration in West and Central Africa… areas… where you have a lot of movements, like Agadez… And so we’ve been able with those FMPs [flow monitoring points] to… point at areas where you do have those… concentrations of migrants that probably leads to protection issues and responses being needed… The second one was a bit more ambitious, and I think that’s the one we have not really achieved so far, but there has been this constant question of ‘how many?’. ‘How many migrants, how many are moving, how many are arriving?’… The EU itself is not able to give you the number of movements from Italy to France in a province. Us being able to do it without the border control capacities that Europe has… And then… it’s also not really clear what will be the use of that kind of data, and yet right now everyone is on that, everyone wants to know those kind of… key flows. But… unless you actually closed every border and put a fence in the desert, you will never be able to have that kind of idea of volume of flows. (interview 27/5/2020, emphases in original)

The care and control duality (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015) is evident here, with the IOM official explaining the use of the data to both identify protection needs and monitor movements to Europe, thus reproducing Frontex’s inverted

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147 As Monsutti (2008, p. 58, emphasis added) points out: “the three solutions to the problem of the refugees promoted by the UNHCR (voluntary repatriation in the country of origin; integration in the host country; resettlement in a third country) are based on the idea that solutions are found when movements stop”. 
humanitarian border control. Apart from illustrating the ‘myth of control’ (De Genova, 2013a; Hollifield, 2004; Joppke, 1998), the quote shows how IOM (un)wittingly provides data which feeds into the information base upon which political and operational decisions are made in European external(ized) border control – serving a similar function as Frontex’s risk analyses. The interviewee thus ignores IOM’s banal securitization by failing to consider the consequences of their data collection for refugees and migrants, which illustrates securitization’s normalization in this field. This is similar to Billig’s (1995) description of citizens’ unmindful reproduction of banal nationalism, which becomes so inconspicuous that it vanishes from sight. This (un)willful ignorance is further illustrated by the quote from another IOM official, who described reconsidering this data gathering as naive:

I think it would be… ideal if we would know in advance what data we need and then collect it. But of course… this is also an industry… it’s a rush for gold, you know. All the agencies are there trying to get more money for their own things, and so there’s duplication, there’s competition. So this is the dysfunctionality of the UN system and… also NGOs… it’s not like it’s an idealistic world where you want to help, it’s a business where people need money to survive. (interview 22/4/2020, emphases in original)

Apart from revealing the “dysfunctionality” of the humanitarian sector, this quote illustrates IOM’s unintentional furthering of banal securitization by means of which their data is used. The interviewee’s disregard for how IOM’s data is used by European policymakers is paralleled by her colleague in the DTM Europe office, who denied any evidence of and responsibility for its negative consequences (interview 10/2/20). The IOM officials thus display a similar lack of critical reflection over the potentially harmful consequences of their work as the border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials – banally securitizing migration through their everyday work and as such contributing to its normalization in this field. This is further illustrated by the quote from the IOM official at the Missing Migrants project, who reflected on how their frequent reporting on “irregular arrivals” might have contributed to the perception of a ‘crisis’ in 2015:

148 As Bigo et al. (2016, p. 54, emphasis in original) note, in the “field of European security professionals”, the focus is “increasingly put on access to databases per se, while the necessity of a prior common definition of relevant data… is generally neglected”.

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Looking back, I often think… ‘should we have been putting information out on arrivals and deaths twice a week?’ Maybe that was actually more harmful than not, because when you have the *regular migration statistics* it comes like six months into the following year, and you just get one figure for the whole year... So, kind of a strange effect of actually providing good information having maybe a negative- or feeding this sort of *narrative on crisis*. (interview 30/1/20, emphases added)

This illustrates the counterproductive effects of IOM’s reporting on irregularized migration and deaths, which in this case *fueled* the crisis discourse rather than countering it. While retrospectively showing a reflexive attitude towards the consequences of her work, this IOM official unintentionally *reproduced* the crisis discourse at the time through her everyday work, and as such furthered banal securitization and its normalization in this field.

Similarly, the Drop in the Ocean and Samos Volunteers interviewees were critical of NGOs continued presence on the Greek islands five years after the 2015 ‘crisis’, questioning their necessity with the declining numbers of arrivals (interviews 19/3/20, 20/4/20, 19/5/20). Despite discursively rejecting the sustained crisis, these NGOs are implicated in its *reification* through their on the ground practices, which are geared towards emergency assistance (such as AlarmPhone Sahara’s SAR operations in the desert) and the provision of basic services (e.g., Drop in the Ocean’s laundry service on Lesvos). While providing a life-saving service, SOS Mediterranee conducts a limited humanitarian intervention in time and space, similar to Frontex’s SAR operations (see also Pallister-Wilkins, 2017). Likewise, clothes are basic necessities and the washing of them cover only basic needs, thus constituting a short-term solution to the situation for refugees and migrants at the external(ized) border – similar to humanitarian border control. This indicates that NGOs in this field are caught up in the crisis discourse promulgated by Frontex’s border knowledge, which both indicates its hegemony and affects their practices on the ground – contributing to the *normalization* of crisis at Europe’s borders.

I also witnessed Drop in the Ocean’s preoccupation with crisis response during my fieldwork, where the needs of the “beneficiaries” was deemed so urgent that volunteers worked shifts longer than 9 hours a day with few breaks (in Krakow), six days a week (on Lesvos), in challenging environments with poor sanitary facilities (Lesvos), and in direct contact with traumatized people without much training. The resulting high turnover rate of volunteers meant that the NGO was constantly recruiting and onboarding new volunteers, with its business model...
relying on the availability of a large reserve pool of unpaid labor ready to travel to the latest ‘crisis’. Drop in the Ocean’s short-term orientation is similar to that of the Swedish coast guards and Frontex officials, whose focus was on practical questions in the here and now (such as saving lives or stopping smugglers) rather than long-term solutions to irregularized migration and deaths at the borders. Thus, similar to Frontex’s border knowledge, these NGOs inadvertently contribute to normalize crises at Europe’s borders through their emergency practices (see also Mogstad, 2021). Drop in the Ocean’s operations in Krakow illustrates this normalization, with its clothes distribution center being called “the free shop” and made to look like a normal clothing store where the “beneficiaries” could pick out the clothes they wanted rather than being handed an item in their size. The idea behind this was to give them a sense of dignity, and the volunteers’ work was similar to that of any clothing store: unpacking boxes (in this case donations), bringing them to the right section on the shop floor (men’s sweaters, etc.), helping people find their right size, and re-stocking.

The shop was even located in an abandoned shopping mall on the outskirts of the city which had been planned for demolition before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when it became re-purposed as a reception center for Ukrainian refugees. What gave it away that this was no ordinary clothing store were the intact Carrefour signs inside, with its meat and cheese sections still indicated on the walls, along with hangers and racks donated from IKEA, with its obtrusive dark blue and yellow colors. This imposition of normalcy on an exceptional situation is also illustrated by the fact that the people working there were not paid staff but volunteers who came to help just for the day, which meant an even higher turnover rate than on Lesvos. There were also no payments conducted at the check-out counter but a registration of how many items each “beneficiary” had taken for Drop in the Ocean’s statistics. This demonstrates that in the same way that securitization can be routine and banal (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995) so can crisis response, with many of the volunteers finding the work drearier than they had anticipated and the “beneficiaries” incorporating the shopping and laundry service into their weekly schedule.

This section has illustrated that although civil society actors discursively resist securitization and the crisis discourse that engulfs it, they undeliberately further both through their daily practices, including: 1) their lack of critical reflection over the consequences of their work for refugees and migrants (IOM), and 2) crisis-oriented responses on the ground that contribute to its normalization (NGOs). They thus make the same mistake as Billig (1995) accuses Western nationalism scholars of: by recognizing Frontex and Europe’s fervent...
securitization of migration and distancing themselves from it, they miss the more subtle forms of securitization which they reproduce in their everyday work. This indicates securitization’s normalization in this field, where not even critical voices from civil society are immune to it. This means that securitization, like banal nationalism, is “near the surface of contemporary life” (Billig, 1995, p. 93, emphasis added) rather than only being exerted by powerful state actors during extraordinary moments.

Overall, this chapter has shown that while there is some resistance among especially civil society actors and border guards towards the securitization of migration in this field it is still dominant, being largely normalized among the Frontex and DG Home officials. The normalization of securitization is indicated by securitization’s high frequency and strong degree in this field, which is coupled by the low number of counter discourses and weak resistance (see Figure 5). Just like citizens neglect the “un waved flags” of nationalism in their everyday lives (Billig, 1995, p. 43), so do these actors fail to notice banal securitization precisely because it is so “familiar” and thus “forgettable”. As Billig (1995, p. 49, emphasis added) points out, “common sense… amounts to a collective amnesia… ‘Our’ common sense is routinely forgotten, being unnamed as nationalism”. With securitization becoming increasingly ‘commonsensical’ (Fairclough, 2015) in this field, it is no wonder that these actors do not see what is hidden in plain sight.
7) CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

If there were no borders, there would indeed be no migrants – only mobility. (De Genova, 2013b, p. 253, emphasis added)

This last chapter offers some final reflections and looks to the challenges ahead. It starts by summarizing the dissertation’s findings and contributions, before moving on to discuss why it is important to not see like Frontex if we are to de-securitize and normalize migration. The third section sketches out the wider implications of the Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, showing how it represents a continued normalization of securitization in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control. The last section suggests important avenues for future research, especially on knowledge production on migration, the racialized aspect of securitization, and the digitalization of border controls.

Conclusion

The dissertation set out to answer the following research questions:

1) How does Frontex’s border knowledge securitize migration and normalize this securitization? What is the role of the construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism?

2) Is the securitization of migration normalized in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control? How do civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials resist or reproduce it?

In answering the first research question, I examined how Frontex’s risk analysis reports securitize migration in both banal (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995) and explicit (Buzan et al., 1998) ways by drawing on the discursive practices of construction, reproduction, inflation, inversion, and obscuring. These refer to the discursive
ways in which Frontex’s border knowledge portrays migration as a ‘security threat’. Drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), I examined how Frontex not only reports on but also constructs, reproduces, and inflates the risks posed by refugees and migrants by drawing on a securitized discourse in describing irregularized migration and overemphasizing the migratory ‘pressure’ at the borders due to its (double) counting methodology. By focusing on the discursive practice of inversion in the reports, I was able to demonstrate how Frontex portrays crises as normal rather than exceptional by constantly invoking a crisis discourse despite a declining number of arrivals. It also allowed me to show how more border control but less SAR is framed as in being in the best interest of refugees and migrants. The focus on the discursive practice of obscuring illustrated how the reports invisibilize as much as they visibilize the situation at the borders by leaving out any information relating to fundamental rights or deaths, which produces a form of non-knowledge (see Aradau, 2023; Glouftsios, 2023b; Scheel, 2022) on these issues that contributes to a situational unawareness of them in this field.

In addition to examining how Frontex securitizes migration by drawing on these discursive practices, I identified 11 securitizing themes in the reports, which were categorized according to whether they relate to the construction of risk, crisis, or humanitarianism. The analysis demonstrated that Frontex’s border knowledge constructs risk by deploying a detached and de-humanizing discourse, portraying mobility as inherently risky, constructing criminalizing categories, reproducing the irregular/regular binary, framing risk analysis as the panacea, and conflating asylum with migration, crime, and terrorism. The first theme relates to how the reports de-humanize refugees and migrants by drawing on a dispassionate discourse that treats them as aggregate numbers, whereas the border is conversely anthropomorphized, being described as ‘vulnerable’ to ‘migratory pressure’. The second theme illustrates how the reports portray mobility as inherently risky by underlining the abuse of visa liberalization for purposes of irregularized migration, arguing for stricter visa policies instead. The third theme showcases some of the criminalizing figures of migration that the reports construct, such as the ‘irregular migrant’. The fourth theme illustrates how the reports reproduce the distinction between regular and ‘irregular’ mobility by highlighting the risk posed by the latter.

The fifth theme demonstrates how Frontex portrays risk analysis as crucial for informed decision-making in European external(ized) border control, which strengthens its role in this field. The sixth and seventh themes reveal how the reports lump asylum and migration together and treat them as synonymous with
crime. The dissertation further analyzed how Frontex constructs crisis by (re)producing and inflating irregularity, risk, and crisis at the external(ized) border, as well as inverting and normalizing crisis by invoking the sense of a constant crisis at the borders. The eight theme sheds light on how the reports actively generate risks and crises at the external(ized) border, as well as overstate them due to its counting practices. The ninth theme illuminates how Frontex normalizes crises at the external(ized) border by discursively reproducing them, as well as inverts crisis by portraying it as normal. Frontex’s construction of humanitarianism was illustrated by the reports’ logic of inverted humanitarian border control and use of a securitized humanitarian crisis discourse. The tenth theme refers to the reports’ construction of hierarchies of deservingness and vulnerability and depiction of non-rescue as saving lives. The last theme is related to Frontex’s fusion of security, crisis, and humanitarian discourses, treating refugees and migrants as both ‘at risk’ and ‘risky’ (see Aradau, 2004; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015).

I have thus studied the process in which migration is securitized in Frontex’s border knowledge. In doing so, I paid attention to both securitization’s form and degree (see Figure 4), examining whether it was expressed banally (Bigo, 2002; Billig, 1995) or explicitly (Buzan et al., 1998) and if the degree was moderate or intense. The analysis showed that while securitization mostly took on a mundane form and moderate degree in the different themes, this continuous process that works in the background is ruptured by moments of explicit securitizations of an intense degree. This is the case when security discourse is paired with crisis discourse, such as in the reports’ discussions of the 2011 Arab Spring, the 2015 ‘migration crisis’, and the Covid19 pandemic, as well as when migration is linked with terrorism, like in the theme of the migration-terrorism nexus. Securitization’s form and degree are thus intricately linked, with banal securitization being dovetailed by a moderate degree and vice versa. This would be a fruitful avenue for future research in which the analysis of securitization’s form and degree (and also speed) could be applied to other case studies.

The dissertation further examined how Frontex’s border knowledge contributes to normalizing this securitization. In conceptualizing normalization, I borrowed from the Copenhagen School’s notion of institutionalization of securitization and Fairclough’s (2015) naturalization of discourse and generation of hegemonic ‘common sense’. The former refers to cases in which “the need for drama in establishing securitization falls away… [U]rgency has been established by the previous use of the security move. There is no need to spell out that this issue has to take precedence” (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 28, emphasis added). The
treatment of an issue as a ‘security threat’ thus becomes routine rather than ad hoc, which parallels the Paris School’s understanding of securitization and Billig’s (1995) notion of nationalism as being banally reproduced through everyday life rather than during exceptional moments of crisis. Similarly, Fairclough (2015) argues that the dominating ‘common sense’ in a field can be studied by focusing on how a given discourse becomes naturalized and, as such, taken for granted.

By drawing on this conceptual framework, I examined the process in which securitization is normalized in Frontex’s risk analysis reports and how the treatment of migration as a security issue was framed as commonsensical. I did so by focusing on Frontex’s construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism, analyzing how the reports normalize securitized responses to irregularized migration by portraying it as intricately bound up with risk, depicting an image of a never-ending crisis at the external(ized) border, and branding border control as humanitarian – all of which rationalizes increased border controls. Frontex’s construction of risk, crisis, and humanitarianism is hence integral to both its securitization of migration and subsequent normalization of securitization, being used to justify border controls as not only necessary but for the good of the refugees and migrants themselves. Frontex’s normalization of securitization also became evident when looking at intertextuality and interdiscursivity (see Fairclough, 2015) in the reports. I used the former to analyze how crises become cumulative, since the reports build on each other’s invocation of crises over time, and the latter to examine how they bring a humanitarian discourse into the securitized crisis discourse – both of which contribute to legitimizing restrictive border controls in response to unwanted migration.

The normalization of securitization in the reports is also illustrated by what they leave out, such as any references to fundamental rights or deaths at the borders. This also includes explicit justifications for why irregularized migration should be considered a security threat, with the reports being more concerned with measuring the scale of this ‘threat’, since it is assumed that the targeted readers (national border authorities and EU institutions) will understand why this is the case. This illustrates the intersubjective character of securitization, which rests on a shared understanding among subjects as to what constitutes a threat (Buzan et al., 1998) and helps explain why securitization is mostly banal in Frontex’s risk analysis reports – because migration has already become a security issue in European external(ized) border control. Frontex thus does not have to convince its readership that this is the case but rather maintain this perception.
Moreover, as the theme on the irregular/regular binary illustrated, a discursive shift (Fairclough, 2015) took place in the more recent reports, which blur the line between regular and ‘irregular’ mobility and expand securitization to encompass the latter as well, thus treating all forms of mobility as potentially risky. This shift was accompanied by the introduction of additional security checks on visa-exempt travelers through the ETIAS (see also Campesi, 2022); the 2017 Schengen Borders Code (SBC) amendment requiring systematic database checks of all persons entering Europe, including EU citizens; and the reports’ discussions of the terrorist threat posed by EU citizens following the rise of ISIS and the terrorist attacks in 2015–16, as well as the health risks posed by internal mobility during the Covid19 pandemic.

I was not only interested in the normalization of securitization in Frontex’s border knowledge, however, but also whether, and if so how, it is normalized in the wider field of European external(ized) border control. Whereas chapter five focused on Frontex’s production of securitization, chapter six examined its reception among key actors in this field. This focus on both the production and consumption of discourse was inspired by Fairclough’s (2015) three-dimensional model, which holds that any text (e.g., the risk analysis reports) must be analyzed in the context in which it is produced (i.e., the field of European external[ized] border control). The second research question thus asked whether securitization is normalized among civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials, and how they resist or reproduce it. These actors are considered a relevant audience for Frontex’s border knowledge since they operate in the same field, where Frontex’s risk analyses influence both EU-level decision-making and operational responses to irregularized migration (see Campesi, 2022; Horii, 2016). Border guards and DG Home officials are part of the risk analysis reports’ target audience (personal communication, Frontex, 20/4/23), whereas civil society actors were added since they also exist in an environment that is affected by Frontex’s border knowledge, either operating on the ground or being part of Frontex’s Consultative Forum.

On the one hand, normalization was analyzed in terms of the frequency and degree of securitization, and, on the other, the level of resistance and presence of counter discourses. Securitization is normalized when there is a high frequency and strong degree of securitization and weak resistance and few counter-discourses; when there is a high level of both there is discursive struggle; securitization is not hegemonic when there is a low level of both; and when there is a low frequency and degree of securitization and strong resistance and many counter-discourses there is no normalization (see Figure 5). The analysis of the
risk analysis reports revealed a high frequency and strong degree of securitization coupled with few counter discourses, since the humanitarian discourse has been co-opted (cf. Fairclough, 2015), which indicates that securitization is normalized in the reports. The analysis of the interviews indicates that securitization is largely normalized in this field, although there was more discursive struggle among the interviewees than in Frontex’s reports. Securitization was more normalized among Frontex and DG Home officials, who mostly reproduced the security discourse in their accounts and tried to de-politicize border control by framing it as a neutral filtering tool, which obscures the political and normative considerations that undergird it and its harmful effects (see Follis, 2018; Paul, 2017). Securitization was also reproduced by the border guards through their participation in Frontex operations and reproduction of the logic of non-rescue in Frontex’s border knowledge, questioning whether their presence at sea led to more deaths rather than less by acting as a pull-factor (interviews 4/3/20, 15/3/21).

The border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials also showed signs of resistance, however, which was demonstrated by their attempts to politicize border control and shift blame for its adverse effects. The Frontex officials emphasized feeling scapegoated for political decisions to limit SAR and for member states’ dubious operational practices, such as pushbacks (interviews 23/6/21, 6/7/21), whereas the DG Home officials described being equated with the EU and blamed for member states’ shortcomings (interviews 14/4/21, 13/9/21, 8/10/21). Discursive resistance towards securitization was stronger among the border guards, who drew more on a humanitarian rather than security or crisis discourse, stressing the importance of ensuring the right to asylum and saving lives at sea (interviews 2/3/21, 8/3/21, 15/3/21, 17/3/21). Among all the actors, civil society actors expectedly resisted securitization the strongest and were critical of what they saw as increasingly restrictive asylum and migration policies in Europe, the securitized crisis discourse being used by Frontex and European policymakers to describe irregularized migration, as well as the lack of SAR capacities (interviews 5/2/20, 26/5/20, 7/5/20, 4/6/20).

However, the analysis demonstrated that while they discursively resisted securitization, they inadvertently contributed to it through their control and emergency-oriented practices on the ground. The former was evident in the interviews with the IOM officials working with the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), who did not consider the potentially negative consequences of gathering data on cross border mobility of refugees and migrants in Africa and towards Europe, despite this data being funded by European member states and
used for their migration and border control activities on the African continent (interviews 10/2/20, 22/4/20, 26/5/20). The focus on security concerns was also clear in Drop in the Ocean’s practices on the ground, in which the care and control duality characterized its work, with the “beneficiaries” being treated as both vulnerable but also as a potential threat to the volunteers, who must be protected from them. Drop in the Ocean, Samos Volunteers, SOS Mediterranee, and AlarmPhone Sahara were all founded in the wake of the 2015 ‘crisis’, with their common denominator being the provision of emergency assistance such as SAR and basic necessities like clothes distribution. This suggests that they are influenced by the crisis discourse in this field, which they unwittingly contribute to by operating in crisis sites and providing short-term solutions for refugees and migrants – similar to Frontex. It should be noted that while the interview sample was broad in scope, it lacks depth, which means that my observation that securitization is mostly normalized in this field is only tentative and needs to be backed up by further research. The dissertation has nevertheless made the case that it is relevant to talk about a normalization of securitization in European external(ized) border control due to its innocuous character and ubiquitous presence.

Together, the analysis of Frontex’s risk analysis reports, the interviews, and the fieldwork have demonstrated how securitization both occurs in this field and is rationalized as a commonsensical response to irregularized migration – a sort of common-sense securitization – which leaves little room for other framings. I have alluded to the similarities between banal nationalism and banal securitization, with both possessing a “low key, understated tone” and being reproduced through “routine practices and everyday discourses” (Billig, 1995, p. 154). Just as nationalism is present in the “homely discourses” that prime citizens to be loyal to their nation (Billig, 1995, p. 126), I have illuminated how securitization has become so inconspicuous that civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and DG Home officials almost do not recognize it anymore. I have argued that this is problematic because, despite appearing so “harmlessly homely”, banal securitization, just like banal nationalism, has “dangerous potentials” (Billig, 1995, p. 127) and can resurface anytime. Just as Billig (1995, p. 174) urges his readers to “look and see the constant ‘flaggings of nationhood’”, I have sought to do the same for banal securitization. As he points out:

These flaggings are not hidden… Their unobtrusiveness arises, in part, from their very familiarity… There need only be a conscious willingness to look. (Billig, 1995, p. 154)
The dissertation’s contributions are two-fold. Theoretically, I advanced the concepts of banal securitization and its normalization by building on the Paris School (Bigo, 2002), Copenhagen School (Buzan et al., 1998), and Billig’s (1995) banal nationalism. By doing so, I have made a conceptual contribution to securitization theory and the securitization literature, emphasizing securitization’s dynamic character by focusing on its different forms and degrees. I also introduced the concepts of border knowledge and inverted humanitarian border control in order to highlight the role of Frontex as an influential knowledge producer in this field and the inverted logics characterizing it. The former contributes to a burgeoning body of literature in STS on the production of data and (non)knowledge (Aradau, 2023; Glouftsios, 2023b; Scheel, 2022) and invites further research on knowledge production on borders and migration by different actors. The latter contributes to critical research on humanitarian borderwork (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015; Little and Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Williams, 2016), providing a concept that explicitly subverts state discourses on border control by pointing out their inverted logics.

Empirically, the dissertation has contributed to a growing body of literature on the important role of Frontex’s risk analyses in EUropean external(ized) border control and their de-politicizing and securitizing effects (Campesi, 2022; Follis, 2018; Horii, 2016; Paul, 2017). By focusing on the wider field of EUropean external(ized) border control, I have provided a multi-layered account of how securitization takes place and is negotiated by key actors, hence contributing to the Paris School’s focus on the role played by bureaucrats, the Copenhagen School’s emphasis on the role of the audience, and Fairclough’s (2015) attention to the consumption of discourse. Hopefully the dissertation will also contribute to an increased awareness of the counterproductive and harmful effects of securitization, no matter how banally it might manifest itself. I can only hope that it will inspire increased mobilization for refugees and migrants’ rights at a time when these are under mounting pressure.
Not Seeing Like Frontex

The scientific foundations for risk assessment in the migration domain are rather weak compared to the health and safety domains traditionally using risk analysis. This… [raises] the question of whether and how risk analysis ‘securitizes’ migration, rather than simply assesses it. (Paul, 2018, p. 230, emphases added)

By conceptualizing Frontex’s risk analyses as constituting a particular form of knowledge with its own ontology and epistemology, the dissertation has sought to destabilize the projected objectivity of this knowledge by revealing its securitized assumptions. Through the Wonderland analogy and inspired by Billig’s (1995) banal nationalism, I have drawn attention to the inverted logics and banal appearance of this securitized border knowledge, which makes it no less harmful. In doing so, I have thus contributed to subverting it. Following a critical constructivist approach, the next step would be to replace it with a de-securitized border knowledge in order to normalize migration (Bigo, 2002; Buzan et al., 1998; Fairclough, 2015). While this is outside the scope of the dissertation, this section demonstrates why it is important to unsettle the banality of Frontex’s border knowledge, which conceals its securitized content, in order to not see like Frontex. As Bigo (2014, p. 220, emphasis added) argues, “we need critical perspectives that question the truth claims of this universe of expertise” with its “already known future”.149

As the analysis of Frontex’s border knowledge has demonstrated, it exhibits an inherently securitized taxonomy of mobility, categorizing certain types of mobility as riskier than others (cf. Billig’s, 1995, “syntax of hegemony”). Frontex does not merely monitor risks at the borders but manufactures them by drawing on the discursive practices of construction, reproduction, inflation, inversion, and obscuring. A key function of the reports is to transform diffuse threats into calculable risks that can be disaggregated by route, mode of entry, nationality, gender, and age. Breaking abstract security threats down into statistics that can be monitored over time and acted upon (e.g., by instituting more border controls) is the overarching aim of this border knowledge and essential to Frontex’s role as an epistemic actor in this field. The reports enmesh a security discourse with a technocratic vocabulary, which results in a peculiar lexicon in which refugees

149 Scheel (2022, p. 1062, emphases added) similarly advocates for “destabilizing the credibility and authority of security professionals’ expert knowledge and related regimes of truth in order to undermine the epistemological foundation of processes of securitization”.

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and migrants equal risk, non-rescue is humanitarian, and border control brings security. Subjecting these typologies to scrutiny is the first step towards disrupting this securitized episteme in which policies and practices are brought to life.

Frontex’s claim to objectivity rests on the reports’ use of numbers, which in combination with a detached discourse erases humans by focusing on the aggregate number of ‘flows’ into Europe rather than the people behind those digits. This discursive practice of obscuring thus banally securitizes migration, with securitization being normalized through Frontex’s frequent reporting on migratory ‘risks’ at the external(ized) border and the routine production of the reports. The reach of Frontex’s securitization is illustrated by its sprawling number of risk analysis networks with EU as well non-EU countries, which are described as:

An opportunity for mutually beneficial information and knowledge sharing between the EU and the participating countries on a continuous and structured basis. The knowledge generated within these networks feeds into planning of participants’ own border management activities but also to higher level strategic and even EU funded capacity building activities. (Frontex, 2021j, emphases added)

It is not only border controls that are exported through these partnerships but the securitization of migration as well (see Andersson, 2016), illustrating Frontex’s powerful role in this field.150 As Paul (2018, p. 232, emphasis added) points out, although Frontex presents its risk analyses as “impartial”, they draw heavily on intelligence-inspired terminology, treating refugees and migrants as “suspects” to be surveyed and functioning “as a governance tool which disguises highly normative judgements about harms, benefits and costs related to risks”. Frontex is thus a powerful knowledge producer in this field, benefitting from framing mobility as risky since this makes its expertise indispensable to concerned policymakers and facilitates the agency’s growth (Campesi, 2022; Perkowski et

150 In 2021, a complaint was filed by a group of NGOs to the European Ombudsman, asking her to launch an investigation into the transfer of surveillance capabilities, equipment, and training of law enforcement authorities and border guards to Africa and the Western Balkans without proper fundamental rights safeguards (Bertuzzi, 2021; Privacy International, 2021). This included Frontex’s training of the Libyan coast guard, EEAS operations, and the building of biometric recognition systems in West and Central Africa (funded by the EUTF) to facilitate returns. The complaint notes that these initiatives were launched by the European Commission without conducting impact assessments on fundamental rights, which has implications for the mobility opportunities of refugees and migrants and the principle of non-refoulement. See Strange and Martins (2019) for the unequal relationship between the EU and third countries.
This incentive to securitize migration makes Frontex’s border knowledge a distorted account of the situation at the external(ized) border, where it decides what is considered risky and holds the solutions to all the problems it has discursively constructed. As Bigo (2002, p. 76, emphasis added) points out, migration “does not bluntly become a security problem”, it becomes so “when it is presented as such” by security professionals “in their struggle to maintain their position”.

Similarly, the dissertation has demonstrated that despite Frontex’s presentation of its risk analyses as being a comprehensive situational picture of the external(ized) border, they focus exclusively on the ‘risks’ posed by refugees and migrants rather than the risks these refugees and migrants encounter at the borders (see Horii, 2016; Paul, 2018). The methodology of counting the number of border crossings rather than people crossing also banally securitizes migration, with the detection of an attempted crossing being more important for Frontex than the person attempting it (see also Sigona, 2015). This focus on the isolated act of movement itself helps explain why the reports are void of references to fundamental rights or deaths at the borders, statistics which have been left to be gathered by international organizations and NGOs, such as IOM’s Missing Migrants Project and Aegean Boat Report. As Follis (2018, p. 222, emphasis added) argues, by framing cross-border movements as a “problem of management”, Frontex and Europe at large have de-politicized the exclusionary and violent sphere of border control, “project[ing] an image of order and rationality in a contentious field where life and death are at stake”. As we have seen, this de-politicization facilitates the normalization of securitization in European external(ized) border control.

Numbers are key to this de-politicization, serving a legitimating role in policy discourses due to their perceived objectivity (Vollmer, 2011). Numbers comprise the foundation of Frontex’s risk analyses, being collected, monitored, and compared over time and aggregated to form the ‘European situational picture’. However, data never speaks for itself but is always gathered, selected, and interpreted according to certain criteria, which makes it important to examine how data is turned into knowledge (see Aradau, 2023; Glouftsios, 2023b). By focusing on Frontex’s production of border knowledge, I have shown how securitization is embedded in Frontex’s “indicators of irregular migration”, with all of them relating to the ‘risks’ posed by refugees and migrants. Approaching

151 See Martins and Jumbert (2020) for how Europe co-constructs security problems with the security and defense industries.
Frontex’s use of numbers as strategic rather than apolitical is crucial in uncovering how they are manipulated to fit a securitized understanding of migration (see the “politics of numbers”, Aas & Gundhus, 2015). It is thus important to pay attention to who produces the knowledge (Frontex), for what purpose (border control), and how (through descriptive analysis of a limited selection of indicators), as well as the context (a securitized one) in which it is produced.

Frontex’s striving for scientificity explains the reports’ reliance on numbers, cause-and-effect explanations of mobility, and managerial discourse. Nevertheless, as Ekelund (2014, p. 11, emphases added) observes, “using the traditional natural sciences as a benchmark, FRONTEX’s field of activity cannot be described as highly technical or scientific”, as there is “very little established science within the field of border control”. Despite Frontex’s promise of objective knowledge, “normative judgements can never be escaped in risk assessment”, which prompts the question of whether “irregular border crossings can and should be equated, by use of similar risk assessment methodologies, to asbestos exposure at the work place” (Paul, 2018, p. 230, emphases added). A “politics of indifference” thus characterizes Frontex’s risk analyses, where the “individual human beings crossing borders… [are] less and less ‘real’, and more and more just ‘numbers’” (Bigo, 2014, p. 221). As Buzan et al. (1998, p. 32, emphases added) put it:

The impossibility of applying objective standards of securityness relates to a trivial but rarely noticed feature of security arguments: They are about the future, about alternative futures – always hypothetical – and about counterfactuals… A security theory that could tell politicians and citizens what actually constitute security problems and what do not would demand that such predictions should be made on a scientific basis, which means society would have to be a closed, mechanical, and deterministic system.

Problematising the pseudo-scientific nature of Frontex’s border knowledge is therefore important in order to expose the “interplay… between number games, threat perceptions and policy responses” (Vollmer, 2011, p. 331, emphasis added) in this field. The banal appearance of Frontex’s risk analysis reports should thus not distract us from seeing their securitized nature, which their technical presentation blurs. The securitized ontology and epistemology of Frontex’s border knowledge hence needs to be questioned, since treating migration as a security concern is not a given. As the dissertation has argued, there is nothing
given about ‘common sense’, which is shaped by the historical and societal context in which it exists and is reproduced (Fairclough, 2015). This means that things could always be “contrariwise” (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 157), including the responses to irregularized migration. As Buzan et al. (1998, p. 32, emphases added) emphasize, “actors can choose to handle a major challenge in other ways and thus not securitize it. The use of a specific conceptualization is always a choice – it is politics”, not science.

This bespeaks the importance of asking why Frontex and EUropean member states gather data only on border crossings and not border deaths, and why there is disproportionate data gathering on ‘irregular’ border crossings when it accounts for only a fraction of the total number of border crossings (Düvell, 2011; Jeandesboz, 2020). The priority of gathering data on ‘irregular’ crossings, refusals of entry, ‘illegal’ stay, and returns rather than fundamental rights concerns is another indicator of the normalization of securitization in this field. As Aas and Gundhus (2015, p. 12) remark, Frontex’s “knowledge apparatus” does not recognize refugees and migrants’ vulnerability as “an object of knowledge in itself”, only their “crimes”. They point out that “it is precisely through the lack of a ‘will to knowledge’ about migrant mortality that the discrepancy between humanitarian and security considerations becomes most visible” (Aas & Gundhus 2015, p. 10, emphasis added).

So why should we be concerned with Frontex’s risk analyses? As the dissertation has elucidated, this securitized knowledge obscures alternative solutions to irregularized migration, with the mobility of large swaths of the world’s population categorized as risky potentially leading to a race to the bottom in which increased border security leads to less human security. As Billig (1995, p. 28, emphasis added) points out, “the triumph of a particular nationalism is seldom achieved without the defeat of alternative nationalisms and other ways of imagining peoplehood”. Frontex’s securitization of migration makes fundamental rights sensitive responses seem irrational since they become construed as insecure (for borders, not people). This makes safe and legal routes for refugees and migrants seem like naïve utopias due to the perceived ‘security threat’ that they constitute. As Perkowski et al. (2023, p. 123, emphases added) point out, in relation to EUropean policymakers’ framing of the 2015 ‘crisis’:

The crisis to be responded to in such terms emerges inevitably as a security crisis

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152 This is illustrated at the end of Alice in Wonderland, when Alice wakes up and realizes that what she brings with her from Wonderland makes no sense in her own world.
for Member States. Alternative visions… of events were not compatible with an understanding of Frontex as the solution at hand.

Despite presenting its risk analyses as non-political, Frontex’s systematic “non-recording” (Kalir & van Schendel, 2017) of border deaths and fundamental rights violations suggests the opposite and contributes to normalizing securitization. Framing risk analysis as a factual exercise de-politicizes it and the oppressive effects of border controls (Follis, 2018), contributing to their taken-for-grantedness. As it turns out, it is not only nationalism that is endemic in contemporary Western societies (Billig, 1995, p. 10) but securitization as well.

**Imagining the (Im)Possible**

Borders of nation-states have come to be a natural order in human lives… In an era of global inequality of mobility rights, freedom of mobility for some is only possible through systematic exclusion of others. (Khosravi, 2007, p. 321, emphases added)

Having examined banal securitization and its normalization in Frontex’s border knowledge and the field of EUropean external(ized) border control, the question remains: what does the future look like? This section sheds light on this question by sketching out some of the implications of the European Commission’s New Pact on Migration and Asylum, while emphasizing the need to imagine (im)possible things (for at least for “half-an-hour a day”, like the White Queen in the looking-glass world recommends; Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 174) in order to find our way out of this securitized episteme.

Although the dissertation has highlighted securitization’s hegemony in EUropean external(ized) border control, attempts at a discursive shift (Fairclough, 2015) came early on from the top level of the European Commission. From her first appearance in a parliamentary hearing as Commissioner-designate for Migration and Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson has underlined how “normal” migration is and that it should be seen as “separate” from security issues (Johansson, 2019). Johansson promised that she would “de-dramatize” the debate and make migration as “boring” a topic as any other (Johansson, 2020b), emphasizing that “migration… has always been here, and always will be” (Johansson, 2020a, p. 1, emphases added). This sentiment was reiterated by the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen (2020). These efforts by the
then new Commission at changing the discourse were not matched in practice, however, as illustrated by their proposals in the New Pact.

Rather than normalizing migration, the pact furthers security practices in this field, with an intensified focus on deterrence by externalizing migration and border controls through increased cooperation with third countries, measures to fight smugglers, the use of ‘smart borders’ technology to facilitate interceptions, systematic detention at the border, and a stronger emphasis on returns – aided by Frontex (European Commission, 2020a, 2020c, 2002c, 2020e, 2020f). The EU-wide expansion of the border procedure, involving expedited asylum application processing at the border, prioritizes member states’ security concerns over fundamental rights safeguards and will likely lead to the containment of even more refugees and migrants at Europe’s borders rather than less (see ECRE, 2020b). The Commission draws on a similar humanitarian discourse as Frontex’s border knowledge, framing the proposal as for the benefit of refugees and migrants, who will have a quicker decision on their asylum application (Johansson, 2020a) – illustrating the high level of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field. The Commission’s proposal for a crisis preparedness mechanism and early warning system to identify crises and force majeure (European Commission, 2020e) illustrates the institutionalization of crisis response in this field (see Rhinard, 2019), furthering the perception of a perpetual crisis at the external(ized) border.

Similarly, the recast Schengen Borders Code calls for strict border controls in response to health crises (inspired by the Covid19 pandemic), the prolongation of temporary border controls, and the expansion of police checks in border regions (European Commission, 2021b) – the latter of which internalizes the border (see Shachar, 2020). The pact has been criticized by civil society actors for giving in to pressure from a minority of member states with restrictive preferences and prioritizing rebuilding solidarity between member states rather than ensuring protection for refugees and migrants (Woollard, 2020). The Red Cross EU Office representative was concerned with the lack of civil society input to the pact, which she blamed on the “urgency” that the Commission had worked under (interview 4/12/2020) – illustrating the influence of crisis discourse in this field. The Commission also draws on a similar managerial discourse as Frontex’s border knowledge, describing the pact as building “confidence in the capacity of the European Union to manage migration” (European Commission, 2020a, emphasis added) so that Europe can “deal with the situation, before it becomes a crisis” (Johansson, 2020a, p. 3, emphasis added).
The revamped CEAS thus expands pre-existing security practices rather than introducing de-securitized ones, which furthers the *normalization* of securitization in this field. The proposals in the New Pact are thus not so new after all, drawing on the dominating discourse and practices of security, crisis, and humanitarianism in EUropean external(ized) border control, which demonstrates the high level of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2015) in this field. This does not mean that discursive and social change is not possible, however, which starts with questioning the status quo and imagining different approaches to migration. As Lewis Carroll put it, “a thing is not *impossible*, merely because it is *inconceivable*” (as cited in Haughton, 1998, pp. 342–343, emphases in original). Bringing to light taken for granted assumptions is thus important in countering both securitization and its normalization. As Billig (1995, p. 35) points out, while going to war over languages seems “natural” to citizens of nation states today, this has not always been the case. Neither has the securitization of migration.

**Going Forward or Backwards?**

Our *everyday acceptance* of the “passport nuisance” and of the frequent demands from state officials that we produce “ID” is a sign of the *success* with which states have *monopolized* the capacity to regulate movement and thus to constrain the freedom of ordinary people to come and go. (Torpey, 2018, p. 228, emphases added)

How can we explain that migration has not only become securitized but that this has become a matter of course in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control? While this dissertation has focused on how this has taken place, understanding *why* migration has become intrinsically linked with risk and exclusionary border controls is seen as natural remain questions for future research. Postcolonial approaches have made important contributions to this end, exposing the racist underpinnings of Western states’ migration, asylum, visa, citizenship, and border control policies and highlighting how Islamophobia and fear of racialized ‘Others’ buttress them. More critical research into the link 153 See Hansen and Jonsson (2014) on the role of (neo)colonialism in the European integration project; Mayblin (2017) on postcolonial legacies in the politics of asylum; Lemberg-Pedersen (2019) on the links between the transatlantic slave trade and modern European migration control; or Achiume (2019) on the duty of imperial powers to accept economic migrants from their former colonies that they exploited. This also includes “thinking from the border” in the vein of Mignolo,
between processes of racialization and securitization is still warranted, as race continues to be at the heart of the filtering mechanism of Western states’ borders (see Achiume, 2022). This is especially important since future developments in this field point in the same direction, as illustrated by Europe’s response to the 2021–22 Belarussian ‘border crisis’ (Euractiv, 2021; Frontex, 2021e), which gave birth to the instrumentalization regulation (see European Commission, 2021a) that further normalizes securitization by allowing for derogations from the CEAS during exceptional circumstances at the borders in which refugees and migrants are being used to “destabilize” member states (UNHCR, 2022b; Woollard, 2022).

Deaths at the external(ized) border also continue, which is illustrated by the Pylos tragedy, where a migrant boat with 750 onboard sank off Greece’s southern coast and most drowned, due to delayed rescue (Davey-Attlee et al., 2023; Beake & Kallergis, 2023; New York Times, 2023). At the same time, Frontex continues to expand with the implementation of its 2019 regulation, with an anticipated standing corps of 10,000 border guards to be deployed at the external border and beyond. Frontex’s border knowledge will also become more important in the coming years with the implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), the former of which will allow Frontex to monitor visa overstay and the latter which will automate risk profiling (Vavoula, 2021) – facilitating the algorithmic securitization of migration. Frontex is thus set to become an even more powerful actor in this field in the future, with the age of Frontex only in its infancy. As Paul (2017, pp. 696–697) underlines, “the ‘rational’, ‘impartial’ and ‘objective’ character… ascribe[d] to risk analysis may serve to create a perceived neutral ground for member states and the Commission to settle conflicts about the directions and forms of European border control and its enforcement” – thus increasing the scope of Frontex as an ostensibly neutral arbiter in this field.

This calls for more critical research not only on Frontex’s expansion of operations and their impacts for refugees and migrants at and beyond Europe’s borders but also its less visible role as a knowledge producer. The same goes for other actors in this field, including the asylum and migrant smuggling data produced by the EUAA and Europol, along with the role of eu-LISA in applying Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics to former imperial powers’ migration policies, or recognizing path dependencies when it comes to racialized naturalization policies in Western societies and colonization’s impact on ethnicized citizenship policies in former colonies (Fitzgerald, 2017; Sadiq, 2017).

154 The incident sparked renewed criticism of Frontex’s inaction, with the FRO recommending the agency to withdraw from Greece (Folkman, 2023) and the European Ombudsman (2023) launching an investigation into Frontex’s role and responsibility for SAR vis-à-vis the Greek authorities.
facilitating the digitalization of border controls and interoperability between the different databases in the face of AI (see Amelung, 2021; Aradau & Blanke, 2022; Vavoula, 2021). A takeaway from the White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 172) is that it is possible to *imagine the impossible*, however, which means that the perception in this field of migration as inherently risky can be disrupted. This is important not only to counter securitization’s harmful effects but also to prevent its further normalization.
EPILOGUE

Out of the Rabbit Hole

The first person who, having enclosed a plot of land, took it into his head to say this is mine and found people simple enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars, murders, what miseries and horrors would the human race have been spared, had someone pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellow men: “Do not listen to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits of the earth belong to all and the earth to no one!” (Rousseau, 1755/1992, p. 44)

The preface introduced the Wonderland analogy to highlight the absurd and inverted logics in Frontex’s border knowledge and EUropean external(ized) border control. The similarities to Carroll’s fictional worlds proved to be more than expected, with discourse playing an important role in both Wonderland and the looking-glass world, with the creatures constantly debating the “interpretation of words, names, rules and logic” (Haughton, 1998, p. 1). This is not too different from the discursive struggles in the field of EUropean external(ized) border control about what constitutes push and pullbacks, with different actors imbuing these terms with meanings that serve their own agendas. Whereas ‘common sense’ is inverted in Carroll’s worlds, Frontex’s border knowledge inverts both crisis and humanitarianism, with the notion of perpetual crisis being just as paradoxical as the Mock Turtle’s misery because it has no sorrows (Carroll, 1865/1998, p. 82).

Wonderland and the looking-glass world are lawless places where absolutism still reigns, with the former being ruled by a short-tempered queen who orders executions left and right and a king who acts as a judge during a sham trial
Similar forms of sovereign power present themselves, at Europe’s borders, to refugees and migrants, who find themselves in situations where access to the asylum procedure proves to be as elusive as the concept of justice in the world underground. Arbitrariness is also present in both contexts, with Alice being asked by the train conductor for a ticket from a ticket office she never came across, which is similar to the de facto inaccessibility of ticket offices for refugees and migrants due to strict visa requirements and carrier sanctions. Whereas Alice gets lost in the woods of no names, refugees and migrants are trapped and forgotten in a no-man’s land at the external(ized) border, where the crimes committed towards them go unspoken (cf. Fricker’s, 2006, “hermeneutical injustice”). The analogy to Wonderland and the looking-glass world – where everything is turned upside down – has thus proven useful for me to understand the reversed logics in Frontex’s risk analysis reports and this wider field, with the reports being a “mirror-model of perception, truth and language” (Haughton, 1998, p. 327, emphasis added).

Similar as in Wonderland, the reality constructed by Frontex becomes “curiouser and curiouser” the further one reads. Just as Alice tumbles down the rabbit hole, so do established facts alter in the risk analysis reports as one goes along. Although logics in Wonderland and the looking-glass world are different from the real world, they are still recognizable to us in their inverse form. Likewise, the logics in Frontex’s border knowledge constitute very particular ones derived from a securitized ontology and epistemology. What makes Frontex’s border knowledge absurd is not only its banal securitization of migration and securitization’s normalization but the many inversions that facilitate this, such as non-rescue being humanitarian. While “four times five is twelve” in the world underground (Carroll, 1895/1998, p. 255), facts are obscured in Frontex’s border knowledge, which uninforms rather than informs about the fundamental rights situation at the borders by consciously “looking away” (Kalir & van Schendel, 2017, p. 1). Whereas running makes one stand still in the mirrored looking-glass world, non-state sanctioned cross-border mobility does the same in this field, and although time does not run backwards it is suspended for those stuck in the camps littering the external(ized) border.

While all the ways belong to the Red Queen in the looking-glass world (Carroll, 1872/1998, p. 140), Frontex provides the evidence base for the strategic, operational, and budgetary decisions in European external(ized) border control, despite its quasi-scientific nature. Whereas the signs in Tulgey Woods are unable to give Alice a clear sense of direction, the risk analysis reports contribute to short-sighted and counterproductive responses in this field. Where readers search
for meaning in Carroll’s works in vain, Frontex’s securitized vantage point render
some practices meaningful (e.g., border control) while others not (such as
fundamental rights). Similar to the anthropomorphic creatures that Alice
encounters in her dream worlds, borders become sentient in Frontex’s risk
analyses, feeling vulnerable to the ‘threat’ posed by refugees and migrants, who
are conversely de-humanized. Moreover, as Alice shrinks with each mouthful in
Wonderland, European member states shirk away from their responsibilities
towards refugees and migrants, with Frontex’s whitewashing of suppressive
border controls through a humanitarian discourse paralleling the card soldiers
painting the roses red (Carroll, 1865/1998, p. 70) – being only a short-lived
remedy. There is thus a peculiar co-existence of banality and absurdity in the
securitization of migration in this field.

The unlikely comparison of Frontex’s border knowledge to the literary
nonsense genre disrupts the risk analysis reports’ claimed objectivity and exposes
their equally odd neologisms, such as the ‘irregular migrant’. The analogy draws
attention to the absurdity of talking about refugees and migrants as risky, with
this knowledge being no less bizarre than Wonderland, despite the reports being
wrapped as scientific-looking publications. Frontex’s border knowledge shares
the incoherence of Wonderland, being steeped in a securitized crisis discourse
that is combined with a technocratic one, (re)constructing ‘common sense’ in this
field through its discursive practices and inversions that are presented as ‘natural’.
So how can we expose the politicized and securitized nature of Frontex’s risk
analyses? Throughout her journeys, Alice critically reflects upon the worlds that
she is in, questioning what is portrayed there as ‘normal’ (Carroll, 1865/1998, p.
109). In the same way, Frontex’s claim that its risk analyses are objective must
be questioned, since they contain entrenched securitized assumptions, for which
we might be in too deep of a slumber to realize the unnaturalness of, regarding
such an everyday and historical phenomenon like human mobility.

The mundane presentation of Frontex’s risk analyses should thus not prevent
us from seeing their harmful effects, which is all the more important since Frontex
exports its border knowledge through its risk analysis cells and information
exchange network across the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East (Frontex,
2021a, 2021b, 2021d), imposing its securitized worldview onto third countries.
As the absurdist realities of Wonderland and the looking-glass world remind us,
things could always be different, since ‘common sense’ is not monolithic.
Fairclough (2003, p. 207, emphases added) emphasizes that “discourses include
representations of… imaginaries… of how things might… or should be”, drawing
attention to different kinds of knowledges and states of affairs than the current
ones. Scrutinizing Frontex’s border knowledge is hence one step on the way to dismantling the securitization of migration and its normalization in this field, which is enabled by Frontex’s obscuring of alternative imaginations of irregularized migration (see Krzyzanowski et al., 2023, for the normalization of post-democratic logics). As Bigo (2013, p. 121, emphasis added) notes:

The normal practices of rule of law, of the bureaucratic routines are securitisation practices and these security practices are as normal as other politics in liberal regimes, they are not exceptional.

The difficulty is thus not to identify spectacular speech acts in the mode of the Copenhagen School but rather their less overt but nonetheless harmful expressions, especially if they are normalized in the context in which they occur. So where does this leave us? A pertinent final question is whether it is the securitization of migration that is the problem or the borders themselves. Mbembé (2019, p. 99, emphases added) captures this in his conceptualization of “borderization”, which he describes as:

The process by which world powers permanently transform certain spaces into impassable places for certain classes of populations… where the lives of a multitude of people judged to be undesirable come to be shattered.

Turning the problem on its head, he argues that the issue is borders rather than refugees and migrants:

Everything begins with them, and all paths lead back to them… Increasingly, they are the name used to describe the organized violence that underpins… our world order… the women, the men, and the unwanted children condemned to abandonment; the shipwrecks and drownings of hundreds, indeed thousands… the endless waiting and humiliation in consulates, in limbo; days of woe spent wandering in airports, in police stations, in parks, in train stations, then down onto the city pavements, where at nightfall blankets and rags are snatched from people who have already been stripped and deprived of virtually everything—bare bodies debased by a lack of water, hygiene, and sleep. In short, an image of humanity on a road to ruin… [in which] everything leads back to borders—these dead spaces of nonconnection which deny the very idea of a shared humanity, of a planet… that we share together, and to which we are linked by the ephemerality of our common condition. (Mbembé, 2019, p. 99, emphases added)
In a way, the dissertation has traced this “road to ruin” by illuminating how the securitization of migration has come to sharply restrict the mobility opportunities of those who were not as fortunate in the “birthright lottery” (Shachar, 2009) and became excluded from the privileged category of bona fide traveler. While I have problematized securitization, this might only be a symptom of the existence of borders in the first place, without which it would make little sense to talk about either migration or its securitization. In light of the apparent fundamental rights crisis in the age of Frontex, Andersson (2016, p. 1072) might be right that EUropean policymakers “have been looking in the wrong ‘place’ (the border) and at the wrong kind of measure (security) to ‘solve’ the migration ‘problem’”. He argues that this has resulted in a “tragedy of the global commons”, where the securitization of migration incentivizes EUropean member states to push the “problem” onward rather than cooperate (Andersson, 2016, p. 1066) – to the detriment of refugees and migrants.
All websites were accessible on April 8th, 2024.


Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 of 15 March 2001 listing the third countries whose nationals must be in possession of visas when crossing the external borders and those whose nationals are exempt from that requirement. *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 81, March 21.


European Commission (2016). *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of [Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person] , for identifying an illegally staying third country national or stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes (recast).* COM/2016/0272, Brussels.


European Parliament (2021j). *MEPs Call for Full Return to Borderless Schengen Area and Reform of Border Code.*


IOM (2023a). Migration within the Mediterranean. https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean


Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, and amending Regulation (EU) No 1077/2011 establishing a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 180, June 29.


United for Intercultural Action (2020). *List of 40 555 documented deaths of refugees and migrants due to the restrictive policies of “Fortress Europe”.*


APPENDIX

List of Interviews

For the sake of anonymity, the interviewees’ official titles have been pseudonymized.

Civil society organizations

- Advisor, CoE, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees. March 10, 2020.
- Project development coordinator, Drop in the Ocean. April 6, 2020.
Seconded border and coast guards to Frontex


Frontex officials

- Office of the Fundamental Rights Officer. April 12, 2021.
- Situational Awareness and Monitoring Division, June 23, 2021.
- Operational Planning and Evaluation Sector, Field Deployments Unit, Operational Response Division. July 6, 2021.

DG Home officials, European Commission

Others

- Email correspondence, Frontex. April 20, 2023.

Organizational chart DG Home

As of November 2022.
Organizational chart Frontex
As of November 2022.
This dissertation examines how migration has become securitized in what I term the field of EUropean external(ized) border control and how this securitization has become increasingly normalized. It does so by focusing on the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency’s (Frontex) risk analysis reports in constructing migration as a security threat. Although framed as an apolitical and objective overview of the situation at the external(ized) border, I conceptualize these reports as constituting a particular form of knowledge with securitized ontological and epistemological assumptions, which preclude alternative framings of irregularized migration. By drawing on critical discourse analysis, I interrogate how this border knowledge securitizes migration in both banal and explicit ways, normalizes crises, and portrays border control as humanitarian. Interviews with civil society actors, border guards, Frontex, and European Commission officials were conducted to analyze how they resist or reproduce this securitization, which is taken as indicative of its normalization. The dissertation aims to question the taken-for-grantedness of treating unwanted migration as a security issue in this field and draws attention to its harmful effects for refugees and migrants who try to cross increasingly inaccessible borders.