

THE GOVERNMENTAL INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF MIGRATION AT THE EU'S BORDERS: THE CASES OF MOROCCO AND BELARUS

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ABSTRACT

The present final degree project analyses two external borders of the EU to understand what the pre-conditions of the governmental instrumentalization of migratory fluxes are. In order to find what enables the phenomenon, this comparative study looks into the large migration flows instrumentalized by Morocco and Belarus, respectively, that arrived at the EU's external borders through Spain and Poland. Incorporating evidence from interviews with experts and key informants, and information gathered through a thorough document analysis and literature review, this work demonstrates that there is a common framework in which the instrumentalization of migration becomes a possible strategy. Throughout the analysis, it has been found that undemocratic regimes are more able to instrumentalize migration due to their lack of accountability and their centralization of power. Furthermore, the research shows how the EU member states involved responded to such 'crises' with security practices, reinforcing and exacerbating the securitization of migration by part of the EU. Therefore, the project concludes that the construction of migration as a threat and its consequent securitization, evident through governmental practices, is what enables undemocratic governments to use this coercive strategy to serve their own political agenda.

Keywords: migration, instrumentalization, securitization, security practices, Morocco, Belarus, Poland, Spain, and the European Union.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the world has witnessed an intensification of governmental instrumentalizations of mass migration to serve political interests and agendas. From Turkey to Morocco, to Belarus, to the United States, images of migrants living between borders in precarious conditions have raised global concern about these situations where mass migration is reduced to a bargaining tool for governments. The instrumentalization of migratory flows is the focus of the research project and its relevance within international relations stems from the environment of insecurity, the political tensions that it generates, and the major human cost that it involves. Not only does the phenomenon have human rights implications, but it also undermines state security and the credibility and/or reputation of the EU and its member states. Therefore, due to its extensive implications in the IR realm, there is an increasing necessity to further understand the phenomenon and how it is enabled in order to inform policymakers. It is precisely this need to contextualize and shed some light on the social construction of migration as a threat and its posterior instrumentalization that motivates the subject of this study and explains its relevance within IR.

The research project reviews the existing theoretical framework on the instrumentalization of migration that is compiled in a literature review¹. Based on the gap found in the literature, and through a constructivist analysis focused on the securitization of migration, this research project has the objective to delve into the complexity and consequences of socially constructed notions of insecurity and how they feed the foreign policy of governments. This is operationalized with a qualitative comparative analysis of two case studies - Belarus and Poland, and Morocco and Spain - that gathers more in-depth insights into the ways in which migration is 'coercively weaponized' and aims to establish what are the conditions that allow the instrumentalization of migratory flows in the first place in this contemporary world. Through different data collection and data analysis methods, the research project tries to identify broad patterns that the two case studies share in order to reflect on what enables the instrumentalization of migration to occur.

¹ Even though in the literature the term most used is 'weaponization of migration', this research project is set on using the concept of instrumentalization to refer to the same phenomenon, in line with the EU terminology and with authors such as Grzeškowiak that comment on the dehumanizing underlying notion of labeling migrants as weapons.

1.1. Theoretical approach

Following Philippe Bourdieu's contribution, the project takes Constructivism as an international relations theory to approach and complement the Securitization Theory. The constructivist lenses of analysis allow us to conceive the securitization of migration as a social construct that has adopted a certain intersubjective meaning and has been spread through narratives and discourses of fear and prejudice thus constructing migration as a security threat. Nonetheless, the rather positivist epistemic perspective of this theory allows us to follow a methodology that aims to establish causal links. As constructivism is used as a bridge between positivism and interpretivism (Adler, 1997), it allows one to grasp the complexity of factors that interplay in the object of study, and at the same time look for causal relations that can define some patterns and conclusions on the factors that enable the instrumentalization of mass migrations.

Within the securitization theory, this research project is in line with Balzacq's approach that looks beyond the speech act theory and emphasizes the relevance of non-discursive practices and processes involved in the securitization process and the analytics of government. Therefore, the specific securitization theory style is enriched by taking a constructivist approach that tackles the non-discursive practices and processes undertaken by governments as intersubjectively and socially created.

1.2. Research Question and Thesis Statement

This research project aims to answer the following question: What are the domestic and/or global conditions that allow the governmental instrumentalization of migratory fluxes to take place?

The instrumentalization of mass migration seems to be an increasing phenomenon in our contemporary world. And this research project departs from the thesis that this is due to the fact that the securitization of migration is currently widespread through global narratives, and practices, especially in the EU, and thanks to this existing framework third states are able to use migration as a political instrument. Therefore, it is the framing of migration as a threat that enables governments to utilize it in order to obtain some political goals, as exemplified by the cases of Morocco and Belarus.

It follows, that the thesis statement of this research project is that the governmental instrumentalization of migration at the EU borders is a consequence of its member states' adoption of security practices and securitized discourses on migration.

1.3. Methodology

The research project primarily follows a method of triangulation based on a literature review, in-depth interviews, and a document analysis. The general methodological framework in which the information has been used is that of a qualitative comparative analysis. Taking into consideration the aforementioned theoretical approach, the analysis is focused on examining the governmental security practices deployed at the border of Belarus and Poland and of Morocco and Spain. As in the EU, there is the perception of a recurrent 'security threat', securitization has already been institutionalized. Therefore, an analysis of discourses could misguidedly conclude that there are no securitization dynamics, whereas an analysis of the practices could better portray the reality of the securitization of migration in the EU (Léonard, 2010). In order to define and understand what should be considered as practices of securitization, Thierry Balzacq's (2016) and Didier Bigo's (2000) insight on security practices has been followed, which aligns with the Paris School's thoughts on securitization. "Regimes of practices are constellations of discursive and non-discursive ways of knowing, which underpin a particular analytics of government." (Balzacq, 2016, 497). Thus, security is not only reflected through a rhetorical performance but also through technical and/or physical modalities (Balzacq, 2016). As Huysmans argues, "the securitization of migration is a structural effect of a multiplicity of practices" (Huysmans, 2000, 758), and in this analysis, the security practices are mainly identified based on the instruments used, through the agents deployed by governments. Following Léonard's insights provided in an interview, every praxis that is accepted and used with other security issues such as wars or combating terrorism is understood as a security practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Myron Weiner was one of the first academics to reflect on the possible use of migrations as an instrument of power. In his publication *Security, Stability and International Migration*, he focuses his analysis on a security/stability framework that highlights states' decision-making, which does not necessarily have to do with economic considerations, thus not continuing the traditional analysis centered on a more political economy approach. It is in this context that Weiner considers that there is a type of forced emigration that "can be described as part of a strategy to achieve a foreign policy objective. Governments may, for example, force emigration as a way of putting pressure on neighboring states, although they may deny any such intent" (Weiner, 1992, 100). This is one of the first times in the academic literature that migration is analyzed not only from a humanitarian or economic perspective but rather as a political instrument used by states to achieve their own goals. And this research project follows the assumption made by Weiner that "forced emigration can be an instrument by which one state seeks to destabilize another, force recognition, stop a neighboring state from interfering in its internal affairs, prod a neighboring state to provide aid or credit in return for stopping the flow, or extend its own political and economic interests or those of a dominant ethnic group through colonization or decolonization" (Weiner, 1992, 103).

Recently, many authors have addressed the instrumentalization of migratory flows as a political tool (Greenhill, 2010; Steger, 2017; Mitchell, 2022; Łubiński, 2022; Garcés 2022). When looking into this phenomenon more concretely, the first author to tackle it in depth was Kelly M. Greenhill. In fact, she coined the term 'coercive engineered migration' to describe "those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states" (Greenhill, 2010, 13).

In fact, Steger (2017), Mitchell (2022), Łubiński (2022), and Garcés (2022) build on Greenhill's analysis by looking at different case studies. Steger (2017) further develops Greenhill's dispossessive, militarized, exportive, and coercively engineered categories of strategically engineered migration and adds three more types of 'weaponized migration' that he labels economic, political, and fifth column. However, since the two case studies that are examined in this project were coercively engineered, only the coercive type is relevant in this context. According to Greenhill (2010) and Steger (2017), this kind of

‘weaponized migration’ occurs when a challenging actor threatens or actually employs migration as a coercive foreign policy tool to pressure the target into making a concession. Related to this phenomenon, Mitchell (2022) considers that there has been a shift in the practice from when Greenhill (2010) wrote *Weapons of Mass Migration* due to the state’s trend of externalizing their borders. Consequently, the author coined a new term to define the current reality where states “have moved from blackmail to willful infringements on state sovereignty” (Mitchell, 2022, 9): migration-based hybrid warfare. Mitchell (2022) argues that the coercion that Greenhill (2010), among other authors, refers to can be negotiated with the target states whereas with migration-based hybrid warfare, these target states are obliged to utilize resources to process or repel migrants. I disagree with this understanding of Greenhill’s terminology and deem that the term coercive engineered migration does not limit actors’ actions to threats. In fact, in some past examples that she uses in her book, states already had to face a wave of instrumentalized migration before any negotiation could take place, and it is not my view that the expression coercive engineered migration involves such limitations. Finally, Garcés (2022) views the instrumentalization of migration as another side of the externalization of migratory control – similar to Mitchell’s approach. Nevertheless, she points at the EU and its member states as the main guilty parties and the precursors of this phenomenon. And this research project agrees with the fact that migration has become a political instrument because the EU has framed it in that way by creating relationships of necessity and dependence with a colonial mindset that led to the belief that third states would gently agree with the EU’s policies. Another aspect that is worth mentioning, as it differs from some of these authors, is that this research project is focused on nation-states and their instrumentalization of migratory flows, whereas Greenhill (2010) and Steger (2017) do not tackle governments but include a variety of non-state actors in the picture.

In the literature, most works frame the topic in question as either hybrid warfare or hybrid threats (Hoffman, 2007; Wither, 2016; Monaghan, 2019; Mitchell, 2022; Łubiński, 2022; Garcés, 2022). Most authors agree that both concepts involve a multiplicity of actors and that this “blurs the traditional distinctions between different types of armed conflict and even between war and peace” (Wither, 2016, 74). As Wither (2016) considers that the term hybrid has become widely used to describe contemporary warfare, and especially to refer to Russia’s foreign policy actions, he reflects on the different terms that have been

used to approach these same tactics such as ‘fourth-generation warfare’². Similarly, Monaghan (2019) exposes how sometimes the terms hybrid threats and hybrid warfare are used interchangeably without definition.

As it has been mentioned, some authors like Łubiński (2022) or Filipec (2022), frame the instrumentalization of migratory flows as a hybrid threat. Nonetheless, others like Mitchell consider it hybrid warfare, which is why it is relevant to understand how the two concepts differ. Colonel Frank G. Hoffman, who was the first to use the terms hybrid warfare and hybrid threat, argued that “hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (Hoffman, 2007, 8). On the other hand, Monaghan (2019), taking Hoffman’s (2007) work, explained that hybrid warfare refers to the changing character of warfare during the armed conflict where actors combine conventional military power with types of nonmilitary warfare, whereas hybrid threats are “the use of multiple, ambiguous means to target vulnerabilities across society to achieve goals gradually without triggering decisive responses³” (Monaghan, 2019, 85). Therefore, it could be concluded that hybrid threats seek to achieve some gains while avoiding reprisal for their actions whereas in hybrid warfare there is already an existing visible conflict on both parts, a war.

Nevertheless, this research paper concurs with Garcés's (2022) contributions regarding how the framing of the instrumentalization of migration as a hybrid threat contributes to the creation of a narrative in which migrants are both victims and enemies. Therefore, as it is understood that the labeling of this migration crisis is misleading, prejudicial, and contributes to further securitizing the issue, this research project does not follow the above theoretical framework.

There are a vast number of authors that have tackled the securitization of migration (Weiner, 1992; Balzacq, 2008; Bello, 2022; Webb, 2022). In fact, following Bello’s reflection on this topic, migration crises and the notion of insecurity are understood as socially constructed reactions fed by several narratives and discourses. As the author puts

² Fourth-generation warfare: term that widened the concept of war by including cultural, social, legal, moral, and psychological dimensions and diminishing the hegemonic relevance of military power (Wither, 2016).

³ Decisive responses: Monaghan (2019) later on the article clarifies that by decisive responses he means without risking military or armed responses

it, “It is a specific cognition of nation and ethnicity that, through a prejudicial narrative, informs discourses, policies and practices of both state and non-state actors, contributing to socially constructing migration as a security concern” (Bello, 2022, 1329). In this sense, it is understood that the securitization of migration is directly connected to the language and discourses of prejudice within the security dimension, which articulates migration as a national security concern. This important element raised by Bello (2022) is closely linked with the thesis of this research study, which points to the framing of migration as a threat – regardless of whether it is real or perceived – as the main enabler for the instrumentalization of migration to be possible. Other authors like Webb (2022) also show how it is precisely this construction of narratives surrounding ‘migration crises’ and the following securitization of migration that has been used by states to shift the power asymmetries and reshape their own roles within the international relations realm or the regional regimes such as the EU. Nevertheless, as Balzacq (2008) emphasizes, it is not only through the speech act that securitization can be seen but also through the practices and processes of actors and their posterior impacts, which is the perspective that this research study takes.

3. STATE OF THE ART ON THE INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF MIGRATION

3.1. Morocco – Spain

On the 17th, 18th, and 19th of May of 2021, Morocco allowed and encouraged between 8.000 to 12.000 migrants, 1.500 of which were unaccompanied Moroccan minors, (Quarterly Mixed Migration Update North Africa, 2021; Hybrid CoE, 2022) to enter Ceuta in retaliation of the Spanish hospital admittance of the Western Sahara dissident Brahim Ghali for Covid-19 treatment. In light of this situation, Spain sent 200 soldiers and 200 police officers, who were caught beating migrants back into the sea. Nonetheless, Spain finally conceded. In March 2022 President Sanchez officially supported the autonomous solution with limited autonomy for the Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty that was presented to the UN in 2007 in return for the Moroccan promise that it would not instrumentalize migration again (Mitchell, 2022; Miholjic, 2022) and by April their bilateral relations were already back to usual.

As Mitchell (2022), Zaragoza (2016), and Gabrielli during the interview highlight, this is not the first time that Morocco has taken advantage of its border security responsibilities to put some pressure on Spain. They cite examples like the incident in 2014 when the Spanish Coast Police accidentally intercepted King Mohammed VI's yacht and only three days later around 1,219 sub-Saharan migrants arrived on the coasts of Spain and no patrol of Moroccan Gendarmeries was seen monitoring the border (Zaragoza, 2016; Interview with Gabrielli). Or the events of 2017 when Ceuta received an unexpected influx of migrants as a retaliation for the European Court of Justice ruling on how agricultural accords were not applicable to Western Sahara (Judgement of the General Court, 2021; Mitchell, 2022). In fact, Zaragoza (2016) dates the first recorded case of instrumentalization of irregular migration back to 1992. Furthermore, as Miholjic (2022) exposes, the EU has provided financial support to Morocco for controlling its borders for many years.

There seems to be a consensus between Miholjic (2022), Zaragoza (2016), and Mitchell (2022) in pointing at the Spanish need to cooperate with Morocco in order to prevent uncontrollable migration flows at the core of the crisis. Some reports, like the one of Hybrid CoE (2022) even state that this strategy could easily turn against Morocco if

Madrid advances the idea of integrating Ceuta and Melilla into the Schengen area, thus allowing the intervention of Frontex. Finally, Mitchell (2022) understands the externalization of borders of the EU as an enabler of the instrumentalization of migration and points out xenophobia and racism as the root cause of the issue. Following this logic, she argues that the solution must come from better and more efficient integration strategies and from a borderless Europe.

3.2. Belarus - Poland

In July 2021, Poland, alongside Latvia and Lithuania, saw their borders saturated by a massive and unprecedented influx of migrants coming from Belarus. This took place in a context of domestic turmoil in Belarus after the undemocratic elections of 2020 and with repression of the ongoing protests. What sparked the tensions between the EU and Belarus was President Lukashenko's orders to ground a flight to detain two opposition activists and the European decision to enact further sanctions targeting sectors of finance, telecoms, petroleum, and military items (Council regulation, 2021). Belarussian authorities avenged this actively instrumentalizing migratory flows (Miholjic, 2022; Erdoğan and Karakoç, 2022). In this context, the EU did present a common framework of action, and national governments were left relatively free to decide how to handle the situation, which led to breaches of the European principle of non-refoulement⁴, international refugee law, and the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) (Mitchell, 2022; Miholjic, 2022; Grześkowiak, 2022). According to Łubiński (2022), Belarus used the human rights protection system to exploit vulnerable groups and obtain financial benefits, thus making this case study an example of lawfare. Nonetheless, as Grześkowiak (2022) points out, the actions of the European Commission were not up to the expectations as their response was in solidarity with Poland and with brief condemnation of the incompatible legal measures adopted by this member state and the human rights violations committed.

Erdoğan and Karakoç (2022), Mitchell (2022), and Greenhill (2022) explain that in 2002 when the country was not invited to a NATO conference, and in 2004 again, the threat to

⁴ Principle that prohibits states from returning individuals to countries where their life and integrity is at risk (Grześkowiak, 2022).

instrumentalize migration was used to gain extra concessions for managing the EU's external border, to which the EU answered by further financing their own border defenses.

Although authors like Filipec (2022), Mitchell (2022), and Łubiński (2022) speculate on the possible Russian involvement in the crisis and on whether it was part of a broader strategy before the invasion of Ukraine, this research does not engage in analyzing Belarus and Russian connections nor its impact on Ukraine.

The approaches in the existing literature with regard to this case study vastly differ from realist perspectives to constructivist conclusions. Erdoğan and Karakoç (2022) take a rather realist view they ask for the crisis to be resolved from a security perspective without taking into account its humanitarian dimension. Filipec (2022) argues that the crisis has had counterproductive effects given that it provided the EU with valuable experience in the protection of the external Schengen borders and improved border management, thus also taking a securitization approach. Contrary to these perspectives, Mitchell (2022) signals the EU's externalization of borders and their securitization as the main source of conflict.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE TWO CASE STUDIES

4.1. Why look at Belarus and Morocco?

The humanitarian crisis that occurred at the border of Belarus and Morocco in 2021 raised concern about the phenomena of instrumentalization of migratory fluxes worldwide. Nonetheless, these case studies have not only been selected because of their widespread outreach but also due to other criteria like their geographical site. As both events took place at the external borders of the EU, studying them produces a holistic analysis that weighs the EU's role in the phenomenon. And secondly, due to the temporal proximity of the two events. Since they both took place in 2021, the international scenario is reduced to a certain period, which keeps interfering variables related to the global scene at the bare minimum. In this way, the research project follows what Bennet & Elman (2007) call least-similar case study comparisons, also named the most different designs (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). The situations at the border between Belarus and Poland, and between Morocco and Spain are very different. Nonetheless, they share some features and conditions that are the main object of study. In this case, the two case studies are analyzed in order to prove that despite the many differences between the political realities of the 4 nation-states and their relations, the two cases have experienced a similar instrumentalization of migratory flows.

4.2. Data collection and data analysis methods

This research project is based on a method of triangulation in order to answer the research question, test the thesis and grasp a comprehensive understanding of the subject in question. In this way, the observation of research from more than two different methodological approaches also allows for validation of the research by testing its consistency through different methods (Quinn Patton, 1999; Flick, 2004). The data collection on the case studies has mainly been done through a document analysis on forty-four secondary sources of academic writings and reports and primary news articles with 7 videos and photographs taken on the field by these reliable news agencies (see Annex 1 and 2). This variety of sources provides accounts of the object of research from different levels and perspectives that enable a holistic understanding of the topic. Secondly,

following a snowball sampling technique⁵, the research project incorporated the contributions of six interviewed experts and key informants (see Annex 3) until it reached the point of saturation⁶. Finally, each of these methods was triangulated with the literature review of the existing published works on the securitization of migration and its posterior instrumentalization, which allows one to see the gap that the research project aims to contribute to. In terms of data analysis, the work follows the Paris School's thoughts on securitization and investigates the security practices deployed at the two EU external borders that are analyzed through a qualitative comparative analysis of the events.

4.3. Case study 1: Morocco-Spain

4.3.1. Morocco's practices

The relationship between the Kingdom of Morocco and Spain has almost always been shaped by three main issues that have created tensions every now and then: 1) the question on the sovereignty of Western Sahara, 2) fisheries agreements and the demarcation of territorial waters, and 3) irregular migration.

Ever since the 1980s, when Spain began to receive the entry of migrants in an irregular way, Spain struggled to deal with the incoming migration fluxes and there have been periods of tensions with Morocco. Nonetheless, the bilateral relations of these two countries are codified in cooperation agreements such as the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation of 1991, its posterior Readmission Agreement of 1992, and the three renovations of the so-called 'Plan África', which reflected a primary interest in controlling irregular migration (Azkona, 2014). Through these agreements, the externalization of Spanish borders was institutionalized, and conditionality was established. And it is this conditionality that has been reversed when Morocco wanted to disobey the agreements in order to put pressure on Spain and Europe to gain some political concessions. In fact, Morocco, knowing that migration is considered a major security challenge by Spain, has not hesitated to instrumentalize migration on several occasions in the past (Zaragoza, 2016; Hedgecoe, 2017; Mitchell, 2022; Interview with

⁵ A snowball technique consists in identifying contacts of one's social network that fit the research criteria, which in turn refer you to other possible interviewees, thus starting a chain of links (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019).

⁶ Point of data saturation: moment when further data collection is redundant with the already gathered one (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Gabrielli). The Kingdom of Morocco is able to make such prompt decisions with regard to migration due to the high level of power centralization it has and the fact that security forces know where migrants are settled, which allows them to occasionally announce their intention to relax border controls (Hybrid CoE, 2022; Interview with Garcés).

This is precisely what happened between the 17th and 19th of May of 2021 when at least 8.000 people swam to the Spanish coasts from Morocco. On those days, the Moroccan border guards were filmed opening one of the frontier fences (Video El País, May 18, 2021) and there are testimonies of migrants claiming the Moroccan police told them to go to Ceuta through an open entry point (Sánchez, May 19, 2021). According to France 24, citing the official MAP news agency, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita said “The true source of the crisis is the welcome Madrid gave to the Polisario separatist militia leader under a false identity” (France 24, May 20, 2021). Nonetheless, this episode also achieved another result, Spain’s abandonment of its neutral position regarding the sovereignty and status of Western Sahara).

Therefore, although the instrumentalization of migration by the Kingdom of Morocco is not new, it does seem to have intensified over the past years. It seems that Morocco, having become indispensable for European states (Interview with Garcés) and aware of the securitization of migration by Spain and the EU, has become fonder of the use of this coercive strategy to obtain their desired political aims.

4.3.2. Spain’s practices

Within the context of this bilateral relation of border externalization based on certain conditional cooperation, Spain increasingly securitized migration. It began in 1993 with the erection of fences at the border and the installment of motion detectors, infrared cameras, and control towers and continued the development of border walls or fences. (Zaragoza, 2016). Then, with Aznar’s government, a state-of-the-art surveillance system was implemented, the Integrated System of Exterior Surveillance (SIVE). Precisely these securitization practices were once again evident in the Spanish government’s response - ruled by a center-left coalition of PSOE and Unidas Podemos - to the event of May 2021. On the same 17th of May, the Minister of Interior announced the ‘immediate reinforcement’ of 50 troops of the ‘Guardia Civil’ and 150 agents of the National Police that awaited the arrivals with anti-riot equipment, apart from the already present 1.200

officers patrolling the border (Ibon, 2021; Euro-Med Monitor, 2021). The next day, the ‘Legionarios y Fuerzas regulares del Ejército’ – that is, the army – was deployed to the border with at least 4 armored vehicles (Villarejo, 2021; Sempere, 2021). Finally, on the 19th of that same month, the arrivals were stopped due to the use of batons, tear gas, and aerosol sprays by the security forces against the migrants that were grouped on the other side of the border (Sánchez & Testa, 2021, Senna, 2021; Iridia & Novact, 2023). And most of the migrants that managed to enter Spanish territory were collectively returned immediately in an indiscriminate way without the proper procedure, even if they were petitioners of international protection (Defensor del Pueblo, 2022; Iridia & Novact, 2023). Seeing these developments, it is clear that the Spanish governmental response consisted of heavily securitized practices, aligned with its previous line of actions.

4.3.3. European Union position

The management of migration and border control are mixed competencies shared between the EU and its member states (Casas, Cobarrubias & Pickles, 2010), which is why the European position in the events is of relevance in the analysis. Nonetheless, as Spain sees migration national political issue of key importance, it is usually reluctant to ask for the presence of Frontex in its borders (Interview with Lo Coco).

The EU shares the concern about irregular migration with Spain. In fact, Morocco has approximately received over 13 billion euros in development funds from the EU between 2007 and 2021 in exchange for heavily controlled borders (Casey & Bautista, 2021; Miholjic, 2021). Border externalization is fundamental to the EU’s external action, as evidenced by its willingness to collaborate with non-EU countries to manage irregular migration (Cassarino, 2021), as exemplified in the European Agenda on Migration (Carrera, Cassarino, El Qadim, Lahlou & den Hertog, 2016). Broadly summarized, the EU cooperates with Morocco in mainly three areas: readmissions, border controls, and protection of asylum-seekers.

That being established, the positioning of the European Union was that of support for its fellow member state Spain. The president of the European Council Charles Michel sent support and showed solidarity with Spain while repeating that Spain’s borders are UE’s

borders⁷. The president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen also stood in solidarity with Ceuta and Spain⁸, and the vice president Margaritis Schinas warned that Europe would not be intimidated by anyone on the issue of migration and offered means and resources to Spain as he claimed that Ceuta is Europe and thus it is a problem of the UE (EP Cinco días, 2021). Furthermore, a joint motion of the European Parliament for a resolution on the breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta was presented. There, Morocco’s use of border control and migration to put political pressure on Spain was rejected, and the response of the Spanish security forces was applauded. Overall, the European position was limited to discursive displays of support to its member state Spain and a rejection of Morocco’s actions.

Conceptual map of Case Study 1: Morocco-Spain

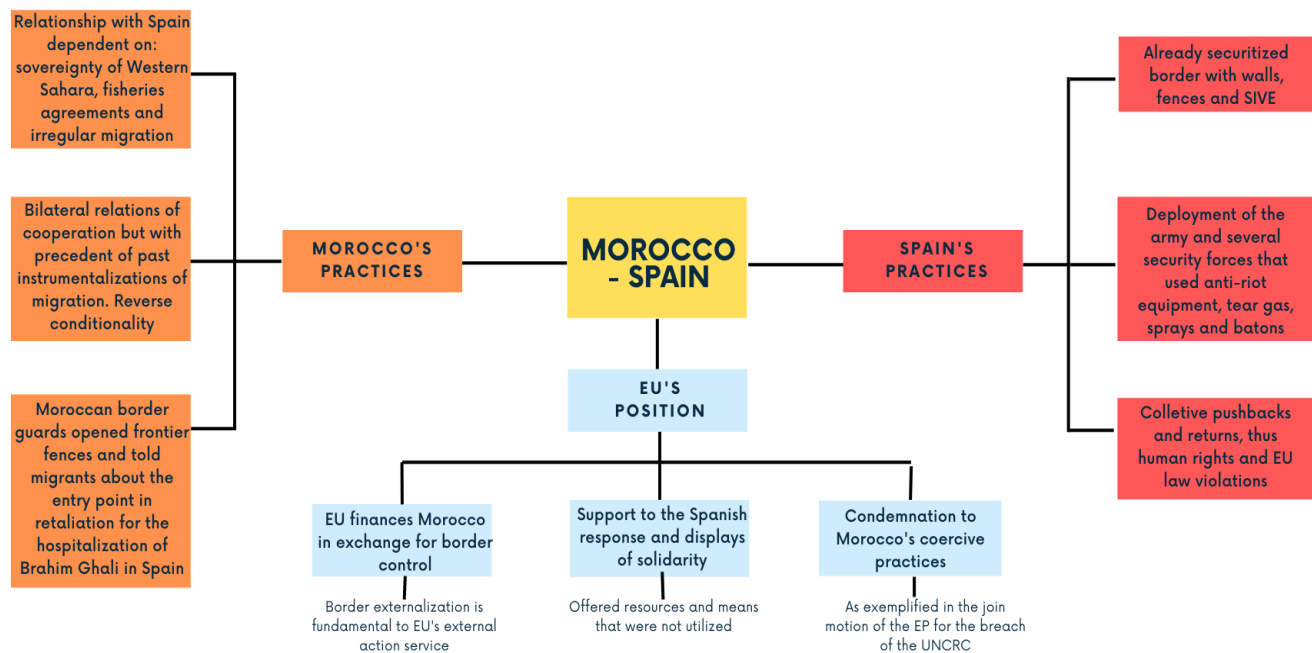


Figure 1: Júlia Puigdomènech Vidal, 2023.

⁷ Charles Michel, Twitter post, May 18, 2021, 13.24. <https://twitter.com/eucopresident/status/1394614970151755776?s=20>

⁸ Ursula von der Leyen, May 18, 2021, 15.31. <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1394646949643575298?s=19>

4.4. Case study 2: Belarus-Poland

4.4.1. *Belarus' practices*

Belarus is a country that usually receives a low flow of migrants from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic states (Erdogan & Karakoç, 2022), as immigrants from the Middle East tend to try to entry into Europe via the Mediterranean nations (Mitchell, 2022). Nonetheless, since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in July 2021 the Poland Border Guard stopped around 16.000 migrants at the border with Belarus (Schmitz, 2021; Łubiński, 2022), and on the 4th of January, they announced they had recorded 39.670 attempts of irregular border crossing through 2021 whereas in 2020 there were only 129 attempts (Grzeskowiak, 2022). Furthermore, most migrants were Iraqi Kurds, Iraqi Arabs, Afghans, Syrians, and Yemenis (Mitchell, 2022). This data only adds to the proven fact that Belarus actively engineered and created an artificial migration route (Miholjic, 2022).

Several sources found that Belarus advertised through travel agencies like the state-owned travel agency Centrkurort and the Tsentrkurort agency, which is subordinated to the presidential administration in Belarus, tourism packages with visas— as the formalities for receiving a visa were simplified (LRT, 2021; Erdogan & Karakoç, 2022; Acaps, 2022; Filipec, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022). Migrants were housed in state-owned hotels, transported by buses, and pushed at the Polish border (Politico, 2021) - among other EU bordering countries - by the Belarusian forces, who did not allow them to return using batons and tear gas and wearing full riot gear (Henley and Rankin, 2021; Łubiński, 2022; Hybrid CoE, 2022; Mitchell, 2022). Thanks to the involvement of airlines like the Belarusian state-run airline Belavia, Iraqi Airways, and Fly Baghdad, there were direct flights from Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Basra in Iraq to Minsk and later from Afghanistan and Istanbul (Mitchell, 2022; Hybrid CoE, 2022; Grzeskowiak, 2022).

Although, as it has been mentioned, it was not the first time that President Aleksandr Lukashenko had threatened to instrumentalize migration, it was the first time the threat materialized and it is clear that this Belarusian instrumentalization of migration was the response to the European Union's continuous enactment of sanctions with the aim of either punishing back the EU or dissuading it from further sanctioning.

4.4.2. Poland's practices

The initial reactions of all three member states – Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia - that received mass influxes of migrants were similar, as they all shared their unwillingness to welcome migrants into their countries. Nonetheless, this analysis is only focused on the Polish reaction to the crisis.

On the second of September, the Polish government – led by the right-wing party Law and Justice – declared a state of emergency in two provinces, Podlaskie and Lubelskie, that demarcated a strip of 3 kilometers with the Belarusian border and extended it twice (Acaps, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022; Filipec, 2022). This declaration meant the prohibition of staying in these areas, recording and photographing there, and thus a limitation on information about the activities carried out, as it only allowed the entry of Polish Border Guards, residents, and ambulances into these zones (Acaps, 2022). Furthermore, NGOs and INGOs, as well as journalists, were banned from entering this emergency zone and faced charges that involved up to eight years in prison if they defied it (Acaps, 2022; Interview with Ossolińska). In October, Poland legalized pushbacks. This means it became legal to force collective returns to the Belarusian side of the border without doing individual assessments of asylum petitions nor following due process (Amnesty International, 2022), which not only defies European law and the principle of non-refoulement but is a clear breach of international law and human rights (Filipec, 2022).

Besides the legislative actions taken by the Polish government, it also responded by sending 17.000 soldiers of the army to the border that used teargas (Roth, 2021; Mitchell, 2022). Complemented by the already present Polish Border Guards that also used water cannons (Shcheglov, 2021) and drones to track migrants near the border and even fired weapons in the air (Acaps, 2022; Amnesty International, 2022). The government ordered the placing of razor-wire fences (Shcheglov, 2021; Miholjic, 2022), had a 5,5 meters high steel wall of over 180 kilometers constructed (Acaps, 2022), and refused to open a humanitarian corridor (Erdogan & Karakoç, 2022), all of which are highly securitized practices and consequently, migrants were left in inhuman and dire conditions.

4.4.3. European Union position

In order to analyze the European Union's role and positioning in the crisis, it must be accounted for that the instrumentalization of migration came at a time when Poland and the EU were in the midst of a dispute over the rule of law in the country (Filipec, 2022), which could explain why Frontex and other EU resources that could have helped in the management of the crisis were not asked to intervene by the Polish government. Moreover, the tensions with Belarus cannot be ignored, with the EU suspending its visa facilitation agreement on November 2021 (EC, 2021) and placing a fifth package of sanctions on Belarus, individuals, and organizations on December 2021 (ECb, 2021; Mitchell, 2022). In this line, Ursula von der Leyen's tweets and speech highlighted the Union's condemnation of the hybrid attack to destabilize Europe and their response with higher border security⁹, as well as the EU's solidarity with the affected member states (EU Commission, 2021). Ylva Johansson – the Commissioner for Home Affairs – went as far as to state that the situation was not a migration issue, but part of Lukashenko's aggression (Erlanger, 2021). Nonetheless, within the initial reactions, there was no mention of the Polish infringement of EU law but rather displays of support and solidarity towards the government. Only the European Court of Human Rights defined the obligations of Poland and Latvia: to provide humanitarian aid without the obligation of letting applicants the entry into their territories (ECHR, 2021).

By failing to respond to the gross violations of EU law and paying no attention to the rights of migrants, the European Commission condoned the illegal practices of the Polish government and instead adopted the narrative that emphasized the hybrid attack by Belarus. In this line, it is safe to say that the EU demonstrated a securitarian approach to the crisis while disregarding the human dimension of the phenomenon.

Sometime later, the European Union issued three main institutional documents addressing the instrumentalization of migration that raised many concerns. On the 1st of December 2021, the Commission presented a Proposal on provisional emergency measures for the benefit of Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. This was followed and replaced by a more

⁹ Ursula von der Leyen, Twitter posts, November 23 & 28, 2021 <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen>

permanent framework in the form of a Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council addressing situations of instrumentalization in the field of migration and asylum, accompanied by a legislative proposal to improve and amend the Schengen Borders Code. The main changes proposed, that NGOs oppose (Ecre.org, 2022), are: 1) enabling member states to derogate EU law in any situation of instrumentalization, which legalizes the possibility of not complying with human rights standards, 2) extending the deadline for registration of applications for international protection up to 16 weeks, 3) applying the border procedure to all asylum claims and 4) limiting reception centers to only provide basic needs and expediting return procedures. Furthermore, as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles notes, the regulations that offer a broad definition of instrumentalization are not specific on how this instrumentalization should be demonstrated, it does not include exemptions from the border procedure for vulnerable people or with special needs and does not specify if the border procedure would be done in detention centers (ECRE, 2022). Therefore, the proposed legislation changes potentially further infringe many human rights and legalize the state of exception that is the national norm at a regional level by taking a securitized approach (Interview with Garcés). This has been the course of action for several years that was especially exacerbated after the terrorist attacks of 2015 when a link between asylum seekers and terrorists was created, associating irregular migration with crime (Interview with Kaunert; Interview with Léonard), and the EU sought to externalize and securitize uncontrolled migration (Erdogan & Karakoç, 2022).

Conceptual map of Case Study 2: Belarus-Poland

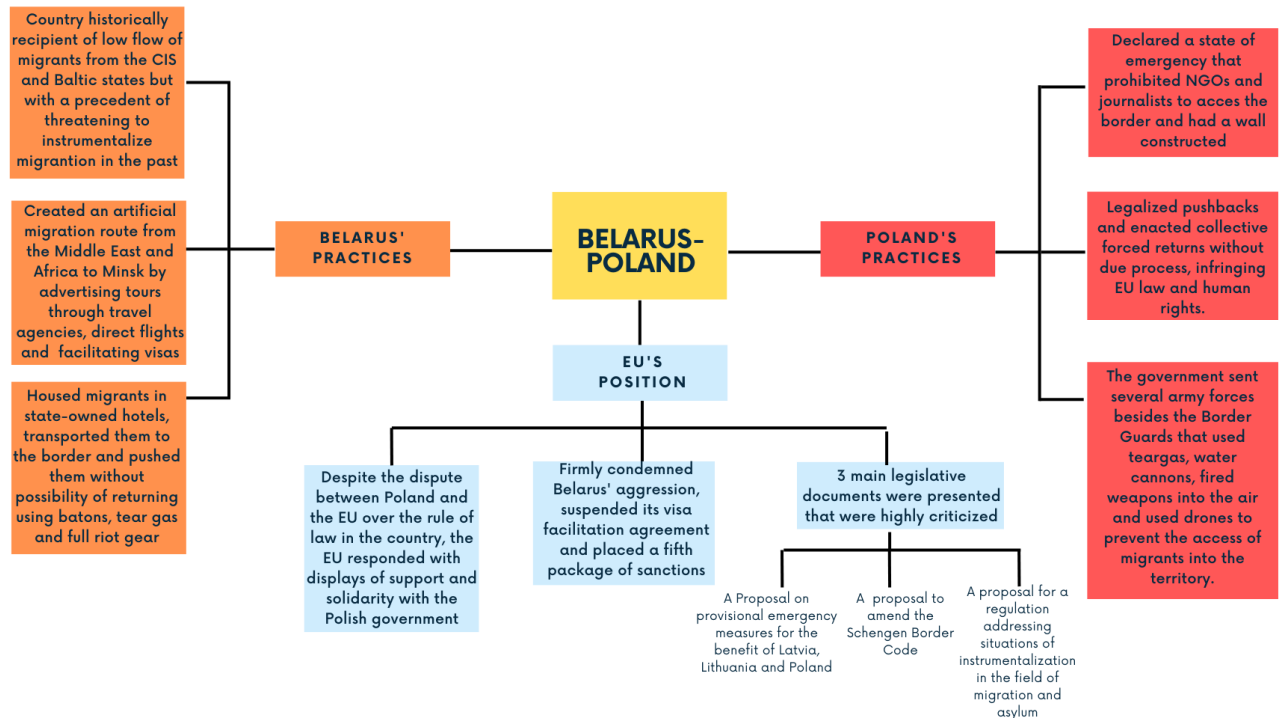


Figure 2: Júlia Puigdomènech Vidal, 2023.

4.5. Findings of the Comparative Analysis

4.5.1. Differences and commonalities between the case studies

Throughout the separate analysis of both case studies several items have been brought up. Despite the different scenarios of both the humanitarian crisis on the border between Belarus and Poland, and between Morocco and Spain, many aspects resemble one another, and it is precisely these commonalities that can shed some light on the conditions that allow the instrumentalization of migration to take place.

Starting with the domestic situation of the receiving EU member states, we see that the type of democratic government does not have a significant impact on the governmental response when it comes to migration management and control. In Spain, there is a center-left government made up of PSOE and Podemos, and still, the orders given did not constitute displays of solidarity towards the arriving migrants but were rather securitized, with the deployment of several security forces, including the army, which was heavily

equipped. This was also the case in Poland, where there is a right-wing conservative government. Nonetheless, the Polish government took legislative action and went one step further by effectively legalizing collective pushbacks and declaring a state of emergency that restricted the right to information and the possibilities of humanitarian aid arriving to migrants. One core difference is the fact that between Morocco and Spain, there was a preexisting important migration route with most individuals coming from the Middle East and Africa, especially since the 80s, whereas Poland only saw the arrival of a low flow of migrants originally from CIS and Baltic states (Erdogan & Karakoç, 2022). This explains why the Spanish frontier already had a heavily securitized border, advanced surveillance systems and fences, and several agreements with the Kingdom of Morocco that led to the externalization of its borders, thus relying on Moroccan control of migration (Zaragoza, 2016; Interview with Gabrielli; Interview with Garcés). Nonetheless, they both had highly securitized responses to the events, which are in line with the general framing of migration as a threat to national security that demands reactions accordingly. Therefore, pointing to migration as a vulnerability and a point of weakness for the EU and these member states.

These two EU member states were in different places with regard to their relationship with the EU. Poland was in the middle of a dispute with the EU over the rule of law in the country, especially on the question of the independence of its courts and the holding of EU funds (Filipec, 2022). Spain was in no such position, and relations followed the normal standard. Nonetheless, this did not impact nor change the EU's reaction to both cases. The standardized and shared response to the events was based on displaying support and solidarity with its affected member states while firmly condemning the instrumentalizing countries. Likewise, how Poland and Spain responded to the humanitarian crisis did not matter much either apparently, as no criticism was issued referencing the illegal practices executed by these nations or their general management of the crisis that involved human rights violations. Frontex was not involved in any of the crises, as the governments in question did not petition so, and hence nation-states were left completely in charge of how to handle the situations.

Regarding the role of the instrumentalizers, distinctive courses of action were taken by Belarus and Morocco. The latter took advantage of the pre-established migratory route that had its own flows and thus the orders given by the Kingdom of Morocco were limited

to opening the fence, letting people know, and relaxing the border control implemented by guards. This was not the case for Belarus since it had to orchestrate the arrival of Middle Eastern and African migrants to Minsk (Miholjic, 2022). In this sense, it has already been mentioned that Lukashenko eased entry restrictions, housed, transported, and pushed migrants to the Polish border without giving them the possibility of return (Politico, 2021; Henley and Rankin, 2021; Łubiński, 2022; Hybrid CoE, 2022; Mithcell, 2022). Despite past threats, it was the first time that it was carried out, whereas Morocco had already put this strategy in motion years before (Zaragoza, 2016; Hedgecoe, 2017; Mitchell, 2022; Interview with Gabrielli).

The relations between these countries and the EU also differed. Belarus and the EU had huge disputes due to the undemocratic nature of Lukashenko's government. This is why the EU reacted by issuing a fifth package of sanctions to Belarus and it only condemned the actions of Morocco discursively. Furthermore, the EU began to try to regulate the instrumentalization of migration after these episodes through two draft legislations that have been widely criticized by NGOs and CSOs due to their ambiguity in several aspects and to the fact that it basically allows the legalization of the state of exception in the borders, where European law would not apply.

Finally, it is questionable if they both achieved their desired aims. Morocco's coercive strategy clearly worked, as it managed to obtain Spain's position in its favor regarding Western Sahara's sovereignty dispute. In the case of Belarus, the political objective of the strategy is more debatable. If Lukashenko aimed to have the EU sanctions lifted it is obvious that the instrumentalization failed, but if his objective was to saturate the EU with what would be labeled as a new migration crisis or if it was part of a broader plan, dictated by Putin, in the context of the Ukrainian invasion then the goal was met. Nevertheless, it is clear that both countries have undemocratic regimes, and it appears that the centralization of power that it involves and the lack of accountability that they have enables them to instrumentalize migration.

	MOROCCO-SPAIN	BELARUS-POLAND
DIFFERENCES	Spanish center-left government	Polish conservative-right government
	Pre-established migration route, especially since the 80s. Consequently, the Spanish border was already highly militarized.	Poland was historically recipient of a low flow of migrants coming from CIS and Baltic states
	Spain has a model of border externalization	Artificially created migration route
	Another case of instrumentalization of migration. It is not the first one	First time Belarus instrumentalized migration
	Morocco opened a border fence and informed migrants that wanted to cross about the opening while guards let them through.	Belarus actively housed, transported, and pushed migrants to the border eliminating the possibility of return
	No Spanish directive affected the areas near the border.	Poland declared a state of emergency in the bordering parts of the territory and legalized collective pushbacks.
	The EU and Spain were on good terms before and after the events.	Poland was at odds with the EU over the rule of law in the country
	Besides discursive condemnation of Morocco's actions, the EU did not respond	The EU responded by issuing a fifth package of sanctions
	The instrumentalization was successful for Morocco as it managed to force Spain to recognize the Western Sahara as a part of Morocco's sovereign territory.	The instrumentalization was not completely successful as sanctions were not lifted, but it did manage to overflow Poland and the EU system with massive arrivals of migrants.

COMMONALITIES

- Coercive engineered migration
- Start: acting as retaliation
- Aim: put pressure on the EU and/or the national government to achieve a political aim
- Securitized response involving armies and security forces
- Framing migration as a threat
- Realization of illegal collective pushbacks
- Human rights abuses at the borders
- No Frontex intervention
- Instrumentalizers are undemocratic regimes
- Both EU member states received support and solidarity from the EU
- The EU firmly condemned the actions of both Belarus and Morocco and reacted by proposing draft legislation to address the instrumentalization of migration that has been widely criticized.

Figure 3: Comparative Cross-table. Júlia Puigdomènech Vidal, 2023

4.5.2. Key findings

Despite the many differences between the two case studies, there are also plenty of commonalities that can serve to shed some light on the pre-conditions that allow for the instrumentalization of migration to occur in the first place, which was the research question of this study. Through the qualitative comparative study based on the least similar case study model, it has been possible to highlight the similar elements that concur in both situations. Having established this, the key findings of the study are the following.

01

Securitization of migration as enabler of the instrumentalization of migration.

It is precisely the contextualization of migration as a threat that allows third states to see this self-proclaimed vulnerability and exploit it to their best advantage in order to achieve their desired political objectives.

02

Security practices as the common framework of EU member states

The great common framework that the two cases operate within is one of the securitizations of migration, as demonstrated by the security practices enacted that were the response of the EU's member state governments.

03

EU member states act on and for its own

Even though migration management is a mixed competence between national governments and the EU, in reality, each state acts on its own, disregarding international and European law without repercussions.

04

Undemocratic regimes as instrumentalizers

The type of government that allows states to instrumentalize migration is that of undemocratic regimes due to the centralization of power they hold and the lack of accountability they have.

5. CONCLUSION

This project aimed to answer the research question regarding the pre-conditions that have to be in place in order for the instrumentalization of migration to take place. In order to reach conclusions on this topic, a triangulation of data collection methods has been followed, thus providing a comprehensive holistic understanding of the topic in question.

Firstly, the literature review provided background knowledge on the securitization of migration and the phenomenon of its instrumentalization. Thanks to the exploration of the works of several authors, it became clear that even though there were many studies addressing coercive engineered migration and its securitization, there seemed to be a gap in the literature when it came to reflecting and researching the causes of it and this is the main contribution of this research project.

Moving on to the empirical analysis part of the project, the qualitative comparative case study model is the core of the research. Thus, by investigating the events that took place during the migration crisis on the Belarussian-Polish border and on the Moroccan-Spanish one, it was possible to highlight in which aspects they resembled one another and where they differed. The factors that both case studies shared are what have produced findings related to what conditions enable governments to instrumentalize migration. As a consequence of a thorough document analysis, combined with in-depth interviews with experts and key informants, the analysis was completed. It confirmed the initial thesis statement that pointed to the securitization of migration as the main responsible for creating a framework in which instrumentalization is possible, and this conclusion is the main contribution to the field. The construction of migration as a threat and the governmental responses that derive from this assumption lead to the articulation of migrants as weapons that can be used to pressure democratic states such as EU member states. Therefore, as the EU treats migration as a vulnerability to its stability, third states are able to exploit this perceived weakness to their advantage. And this has been proven by analyzing and confirming that in fact both Poland and Spain reacted to the migration flows with highly securitized practices. The domestic situation or the member states' relation with the EU appeared to not impact the events, as the EU confirmed once again the fact that migration is feared on a regional level and hence its organs embrace the security practices used by the governments involved. In the case of Spain, as there already

was an important pre-existing migration route, the externalization of borders also played an important role. The established conditionality between Spain, accompanied by the EU, and Morocco, where the first provided funds in exchange for border management of the latter, was reversed when the instrumentalization of migration took place. In this sense, the fact that Spain and the EU relinquished the management of migration is what also gave Morocco the power to use it to the best of its possibilities. Furthermore, the legislative proposals issued by the EU that aim to address the instrumentalization of migration, further legitimize and enable the security practices and the perception of migrants as weapons by allowing member states to act as they wish without any regard for European law. Finally, a finding not expressed in the thesis relates to the countries that instrumentalize migratory flows. It appears that the type of democratic government that the receiving countries have does not influence the response to instrumentalization. Whereas where it does have an impact is in the sending states, the instrumentalizers. It is undemocratic regimes that are more able to instrumentalize migration due to the centralization of power and the lack of accountability, which is the case of both the Kingdom of Morocco and Belarus.

Having said this, due to time and space limitations, many areas of research have remained uninvestigated. Taking this research project as a starting point, there are interesting future areas of research left open to be explored. For instance, it would be enriching to see this model of qualitative comparative case study amplified into more situations where instrumentalization of migration has taken place in order to create a broader dataset whose conclusions could be even more reliable. In this sense, another branch of the project that could be amplified would relate to an investigation of cases where the instrumentalization of migrations has occurred, and where it has not in order to assess the influence of the receiving states' responses to migration crises. It could also be worth researching how the phenomenon has evolved and changed by trying to find the similarities and differences between past cases and contemporary ones. Another possible topic would be the research of the EU's different responses impact through discourse analysis instead of security practices. Lastly, seeing the newly proposed EU legislation to address the instrumentalization of migration, it could be appealing to look into how they will affect the situation lived at EU borders by migrants and the human rights violations that it could involve.

Nevertheless, with the already obtained findings, some recommendations can be issued to inform governments in Europe and their policymakers.

1. Revise and correct the aforementioned legislative package that aims to address the instrumentalization of migration by proposing a derogation of EU law under those circumstances, which are not clearly defined. It is important to include NGOs and CSOs in the process of drafting such regulations in order to ensure human rights guarantees and, just like SGD 17 aims, enhance multistakeholder partnerships.
2. Put into motion the different resources available to EU organs to hold member states accountable for their repressive and securitized actions in response to migration crises, hence reinforcing the need to comply with EU law and its principles. This would contribute to SDG number 16, by promoting the rule of law at both regional and national levels and strengthening the transparency and accountability of EU institutions.
3. Use the new EU pact on Migration and Asylum not to increase its securitization but to create safe channels for applicants of international protection and migrants. This should be done both discursively and through humanitarian practices rather than securitized ones.
4. Make use of the momentum generated by the arrival and welcoming of Ukrainian refugees to frame migration policies around concepts of inclusion and solidarity, thus reverting the construction of migration as a threat and double standards, which is what enables third countries to instrumentalize it. Furthermore, reframing migration into these two main axes would reduce inequalities and discrimination, an objective compiled in SDG 10.

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7. ANNEX 1: LIST OF DOCUMENTS ANALYZED

7.1. List of academic references

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8. ANNEX 2: LIST OF VIDEOS AND PHOTOS

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9. ANNEX 3: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

9.1. List of experts:

Interview with Lorenzo Gabrielli 16/03/2023, senior researcher at GRITIM-UPF specializing in border processes, and governance of international migration with a focus on the Euro-African and Euro-Mediterranean areas.

Interview with Christian Kaunert 21/03/2023, an expert on European security, counterterrorism, and migration.

Interview with Sarah Leonard 28/03/2023, an expert on international security, migration, asylum, border issues, counterterrorism, and European integration.

Interview with Blanca Garcés 12/04/2023, senior researcher and coordinator in the research area of migration at CIDOB.

9.2. List of key informants:

Interview with Maite Daniela LoCoco 28/03/2023, coordinator of the area of migrations at the human rights center Iridia

Interview with Marianna Ossolińska 29/03/2023, volunteer of the NGO Klub Katolik Inteligencia on the Polish-Belarus border.

The recordings of all these interviews are available at the following link:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1mpFV9xeh5HKPSckAjaU-jjETAFzIYTVw?usp=share_link