EU Migration Policy: Analyzing the Coercive Responses of Transit Countries Within the EU’s Framework of Externalization

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EU Migration Policy: Analyzing the Coercive Responses of Transit Countries Within the EU’s Framework of Externalization

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze the intersection between the EU’s increasingly securitized and externalized policies towards migration, and instances of the weaponization of migration on the EU’s external borders. Although scholars have analyzed cases in which states harness migrants as political weapons, depoliticized most depictions apply a moralistic lens that frames these cases as aberrant, decontextualized, and political events. This paper will complicate understandings of the weaponization of migration by analyzing how EU policies of externalization and securitization systematically shape the environment in which it becomes politically advantageous for leaders, such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Alexander Lukashenko, to resort to the coercive manipulation of migration flows. This paper will illustrate how the EU, by treating migrants as first and foremost a matter of state security, creates the transactional logic that recent incidents of coercive engineered migration then harness as a tool against the Union. The current study will draw on information garnered from four interviews with experts in migration diplomacy and international relations, as well as a multitude of peer-reviewed secondary sources. It builds upon theories in the fields of security studies, migration diplomacy and the weaponization of migration.
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Introduction

Research Focus and Framework

EU migration policy is a term so broad that it in essence refers to nothing but the illusion of some cooperative, integrated effort to deal with migration. EU migration policy constitutes a multitude of policy measures, specific deals, development programs, international agreements, and frameworks, as well as the political rhetoric surrounding migration (Vermeulen 2019). This paper seeks to analyze the intersection between two predominant facets of EU migration policy, externalization and securitization, and the tactic of the weaponization of migration. Although externalization and the weaponization of migration have been studied respectively, almost no scholarship has systematically analyzed their mutually reinforcing natures. Specifically, the current study will analyze how EU externalization policies, by treating migration as primarily a state security issue, creates specific political incentives among countries of transit to harness migrants as a political weapon vis-à-vis the EU.

Externalization refers to measures taken by states to obstruct, deter or avert the arrival of refugees and migrants (Crisp 2022). The logic of externalization assumes that through return and readmission agreements, and a focus on strengthening the EU’s external borders, the EU can essentially outsource dealing with migration to periphery regions and states that share a border with the EU. Securitization refers to the process by which immigration is constructed as a threat to state security (d’Appollonia 2020). The securitization of migration should be contextualized in the EU’s historical policy approach to the Global South, which has always been of a securitized nature (Mohamedou, Mohamed, Personal Communication, April 5, 2023). Externalization and securitization are deeply intertwined, to the point that the EU’s externalization policies can be understood as a policy manifestation of its completely securitized outlook towards migration.
Both externalization and securitization seek to protect the imagined solidarity and homogeneity of the Schengen zone by keeping migrants and refugees out of the EU at all costs (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023).

The term “Transit Country,” refers to states such as Turkey, Belarus and Morocco that border the EU and are common points of entry for migrants from the Middle East and Global South (Duvel 2014). Euro-centric in nature, the term “Transit Country” assumes a calculated intentionality among migrants and refugees to reach Europe; it frames these migrations as a linear phenomenon in which migrants move from the Global South to the Global North. This paper will explore how the EU, through policies designed to externalize border controls and responsibility for migration to these external regions, essentially creates a situation in which these transit states can harness migration as a diplomatic tool. In assessing the unique politics between transit countries and the EU, this paper will build upon the theories of migration diplomacy. Significantly, where much of the literature on migration diplomacy assumes the centrality of EU migration policies and conditionalities, the current study will assess how countries such as Turkey, Belarus and Morocco are essentially leveraging migrants and refugees as political currency vis-à-vis the EU. Overall, the study of EU migration policy would benefit from further understanding of how EU externalization policy creates certain political incentives among Transit Countries.

The current study will analyze the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, and the 2021 Belarus-Poland and Morocco-Spain crises. In each case, migrants were harnessed as political weapons against the EU, either to extract political concessions or to punish the EU for its policies. Traditional paradigms of war and conflict are having to adjust to this increasingly deployed tactic in which migrants and asylum seekers are turned “into bullets,” (Leonard 2021) and harnessed as coercive
political weapons against the EU. This paper will contextualize these recent cases in which migrants were used strategically by countries to coerce and extract concessions from the EU within the EU’s frameworks of externalization and securitization. Significantly, the paper will illustrate how these coercive tactics are often deployed by countries of transit. It will argue that the effectiveness of these coercive measures rests largely on the political attitudes and policies surrounding migration in the targeted country, in this case the EU.

Overall, this paper seeks to analyze how EU externalization and securitization of migration creates specific political incentives among countries of transit, in part enabling the success of this instances of weaponizing migrants. By analyzing the relationship between the EU and countries such as Turkey, Belarus, and Morocco, the current analysis seeks to portray these transit countries not as passive recipients of EU policy, but as strategic actors that engage with externalization and securitization with varying levels of cooperation and resistance depending on their larger geopolitical and strategic interests.

**Research Methodology:**

This research draws on a multitude of primary and secondary sources, both accessed online and consisting of in-person interviews. As far as secondary source material is concerned, I rely primarily on peer-reviewed articles and academic journals. These sources include analyses of EU migration policy published by think tanks and NGOs, as well as scholarly articles specifically analyzing the EU policies of externalization and securitization. Because most of the cases analyzed in this paper are relatively recent, all but one occurring within the last three years, I have also relied on news articles to glean the general perceptions and attitudes towards these responses to migration. By pairing news coverage of recent developments in the realm of international migration with theories of migration diplomacy, I was able to develop a fuller
understanding of the sort of rhetoric and popular sentiment that surrounds the politics of EU migration policy. In addition to peer-reviewed articles and theory sources, my research relies on documents central to the international refugee regime such as the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as the 1967 Protocol which removes the temporal and geographic limits present in the Convention. Particularly important is the principle of non-refoulement found in article 33, which prohibits states from returning refugees to territories where her freedom or life might be threatened on account of race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion.

In addition to the primary and secondary sources accessed digitally, the current research relies on information from four interviews with experts in the field of migration diplomacy and International Relations. These include one interview with Dr Khalid Koser, the executive director of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, a Geneva based nonprofit. Koser’s research focuses on International Migration and refugee studies. Additionally, interviews were conducted with Jeff Crisp, who formerly held a senior position at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and who has previously studied externalization and migration within the EU. Additionally, I interviewed Dr. Mohamed Mohamedou. Mohamedou is a political historian and professor of International History and Politics at the Graduate Institute of Geneva. Finally, I interviewed Dr Luigi Achilli, a research associate at the Migration Policy Centre at the European University Institute. His work focuses on refugee studies, migration, and human smuggling in Middle East.

Due to the sensitive nature of topics related to refugee and migration politics, ethical considerations were taken into consideration throughout the entirety of the research process. In conducting all my interviews, I ensured consent from each participant, explaining that any
information shared in the interview could be withheld from the research at their own discretion. Further, in creating my interview questions and structuring my research, I made it a priority to exclude all personal bias, ensuring that the current study is as objective as possible.

**Literature Review**

Overall, there exists scant scholarship analyzing how EU externalization policies create unique political incentives among transit countries. Although there exists abundant scholarship analyzing the general contours and history of EU externalization, much of the work assumes the centrality of EU policies, depicting countries such as Turkey, Morocco and Libya as passive actors at the whim of the EU’s migration policies. Recent scholarship by Lena Laube attempts to close this gap in the literature on EU externalization. Laube’s research analyzes the emergent role of transit states in migration diplomacy, and contextualizes externalization as part of a strategy of countries in the Global North to “defend the unequally distributed gains from centuries of industrialization, modernization and colonialism” (Laube, 2021). Specifically, her research questions whether EU conditionality is the predominant factor in the relationship between the EU and transit states. EU conditionality refers to a situation in which the EU, with its vast bargaining power as a regional bloc, has historically used a combination of incentives and threats to involve third countries in the implementation of its border and migration policies (Laube, 2021). By examining EU migration diplomacy through the lens of EU conditionality, these models downplay the agency of actors at the receiving end of EU externalization. The current study will add to Laube’s research by analyzing cases of contestation with EU migration policies, prioritizing the strategically calculated political responses of transit countries.

Cases in which transit states harness migration as a coercive policy instrument against the EU further counter this prevailing assumption that transit countries are passive recipients of EU
migration policy. In assessing these coercive tactics, the present research draws upon theories from Kelly Greenhill’s seminal work *Weapons of Mass Migration* (2010). Greenhill develops the theory of coercive engineered migrations to refer to cross-border population movements that are deliberately manipulated or created to gain political concessions from a target state (Greenhill, 2010). On average, Greenhill identifies at least one attempt at using coercive engineered migration per year since the 1951 Refugee Conventions. Although Greenhill’s scholarship is foundational to the study of the weaponization of migration, her research primarily focuses on the political calculations of the coercer. In doing so, her theories downplay the fact that the migration policies of targeted countries, usually liberal democracies, actively shape the environment in which these coercive tactics become politically effective. The current research will build upon the theories developed in Greenhill’s book by specifically analyzing the intersection between EU externalization and securitization, and the strategic manipulation of migration. Additionally, it will illustrate how externalization incentives coercive and cooperative behaviors from transit countries depending on state’s unique geopolitical interests and contexts.

In assessing the literature on EU externalization and the coercive harnessing of migration, much of the literature focuses disproportionately on the 2016 deal between the EU and Turkey. Nefise Aras, in their work on coercive engineered Syrian mass migration and the EU-Turkey deal, attempts to close this gap by analyzing the nexus between how management of migration towards the EU should be contextualized in a way that incorporates the perspectives of host and transit countries (Aras, 2019). This work identifies the responses and policies of these externalized actors, such as Turkey, as an under researched area. In understanding EU externalization, this paper will build upon Aras’s work by further illustrating how mass migration can be harnessed by transit countries as a tool to achieve their foreign policy objectives. In
treating the EU’s response to the 2015 migration crisis and the EU Turkey deal, not as some aberrant policy, but as the logical culmination of the EU’s increasingly securitized and paranoid approach to migration.

Although past scholarship has analyzed EU externalization policy, as well as situations in which political leaders manipulate migration as a diplomatic tool, few scholars have adequately analyzed the systematic relationship between EU externalization, securitization, and the conditions under which it becomes opportune for politicians to use migrants as political weapons. Syri Jantti and Benjamin Klasche’s work establishes a theoretical framework for understanding the intersection between externalization and securitization, one that helps make sense of the cases in which EU externalization created incentives in countries of transit to strategically manipulate both actual migration flows, as well as EU fears over unfettered migration. Jantti and Klatsche describe two dominant cognitive frames for making sense of the global refugee regime, a humanitarian and security frame. They assert that the EU is still using the language and rhetoric of a humanitarian approach to refugee policy, while operating wholly under a security frame (Jantti, 2021, 27). They trace the roots of the securitization of migration to the end of the Cold War. At this time, concepts of security were broadened to include new threats which required non-military responses. Since the end of the Cold War, according to Jantti and Klatsche, there has been a gradual blurring of the distinctions between humanitarian and security concerns, to the point that they are now nearly indistinguishable. This paper will analyze how the hypocrisy at the heart of EU migration policy, using humanitarian appeals to justify security-based policies, makes the EU more vulnerable to the tactic of coercive engineered migration.

**Theory: Externalization, Securitization, and the Weaponization of Migration**
This section will develop a working definition of security and securitization, exploring how the EU justifies externalizing its responsibilities towards migrants and refugees by framing migration as an existential threat to state security. From here, this section will outline the major characteristics of EU externalization policies, analyzing how externalization builds upon a securitized outlook towards migration. By developing a working understanding of externalization and securitization theories, the paper will then analyze how transit countries are able to work strategically within the framework of externalization and securitization, harnessing migration dynamics for their own political ends vis-a-vis the EU.

Since the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the EU has slowly moved away from a humanitarian framework for dealing with migration, and towards a securitized framework that treats migration as first and foremost an issue of state security (Jantti 2021). In line with these ideas, Dr Khalid Koser explains that the securitization of migration should be understood as a deliberative policy from the top to create a common enemy. He explains that there exists a gap between rhetoric and reality; most migrants pose no security threat to the state, but once an issue is securitized it has uncontrollable, powerful downstream effects (Koser, Khalid, Personal Communication, April 4, 2023). In line with these ideas, Dr Mohamedou contextualizes the EU’s increasingly securitized outlook towards migration in the post-Cold War period. In losing its common enemy, the Soviet Union, Mohamedou explains that the EU retained this oppositional stance by shifting its gaze to the Global South. In doing so, it increasingly framed migrants and refugees from the Global South as dangerous forces capable of damaging the integrity of the EU (Mohamedou, Mohamed, Personal Communication, April 5, 2023).
To make sense of how the EU increasingly frames migration as a matter of state security, it is necessary to define what is meant by the term “security.” The Copenhagen School (Stepka 2022), in line with the constructivist approach to International Relation, illustrates how concepts of security are socially constructed. It acknowledges that language not only describes what exists, but actively shapes and influences reality. Essentially, this theory argues that security is not some finite, definitive concept; rather, notions of security are constructed through ever changing societal discourses and intersubjective beliefs (Stepka 2022). In framing migration as a threat to state security, politicians and theorists recognize the inherent mutability of concepts such as security. It can be politically advantageous for politicians to invoke security concerns and mobilize civil society against an imagined common enemy. In this way, the securitization of migration should be understood as a deliberative policy choice on the part of political leaders to frame migration flows as first and foremost a threat to state security.

EU externalization policy embodies Europe’s increasingly securitized stance towards migration. Externalization is premised on the notion that the most efficient means of responding to the movement of refugees and migrants is to support them within their own regions (Crisp, 2021). Externalization refers to the process by which EU norms, policy instruments and institutions are adopted by non-EU states in the European neighborhood (Coi 2022). Since the 1990s, the EU has increasingly externalized migration management through capacity building efforts, border controls, readmissions agreements and its safe-country rule (Laube, 2021). Capacity building efforts assume the EU, by investing in transit countries and countries in the Global South, can essentially stave off migration by improving the living and working conditions in countries of origin and transit. This notion is premised on outdated, paternalistic depictions of relations between Europe and the Global South that depict European powers essentially coming
to the rescue of their less developed counterparts. Despite performative efforts to tackle the root causes of migration, EU migration policy is largely characterized by crisis relief measures and short-term agreements (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). Dr Luigi Achilli explains how although one of the main focuses in Europe around migration policy is redrafting the Dublin Agreements, these efforts have been postponed in favor of offshoring agreements and other short-term solutions (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023).

Readmissions and return agreements, a cornerstone of EU externalization, aim to keep migrants as far from Europe’s external borders as possible, but do nothing to address the drivers of migration or to integrate refugees and migrants into the European space.

Perhaps the clearest example of the EU’s increasingly securitized and externalized approach to migration is evident in the growth in funding for Frontex, the European Border and Coastguard Agency. In 2022, Frontex received 754 million euros, the largest budget of any EU agency. In its 2021-2027 cycle, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) allocated an unprecedented amount of European public funds for security and defense, more than doubling its budget from one spending cycle to the next (ECRC 2022). The MFF provided Frontex with 5.6 billion euros in funding, a 194 percent increase compared to the previous cycle. Significantly, the MFF increased the budget in the Asylum and Migration fund by only 43 percent. The relative increase in security and defense funds, and the redirection of development aid towards border management reflects the EU’s increasingly security-driven policies towards migration.

Overall, EU externalization policy is built around an underlying anxiety and fear over migration; it is the policy manifestation of securitization. Through its externalization policies, the EU invests its external borders with both political and symbolic meaning (Duvell 2014). Through development funds, border control funds and readmission agreements, the EU seeks first and
foremost to grapple with migration through buttressing its external borders, and investing in transit countries. By outsourcing responsibility in this way, this paper will argue that the EU essentially grants transit countries the ability to manipulate cross-border movements as a coercive tool against the EU. Although scholars have analyzed recent cases in which migrations were essentially weaponized, few have analyzed how transit countries are increasingly doing so within the framework of EU externalization and securitization. The next section of this paper will analyze some recent cases in which Turkey, Morocco, and Belarus, by capitalizing on the EU’s fear-based approach to migration, were able to harness migration as a diplomatic tool within the EU’s framework of externalization.

Analysis:

This section will analyze three recent cases in which political actors either threatened, manipulated, or created migration crises as a way to either extract concessions or send political signals to the EU. In analyzing the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, the 2021 Poland-Belarus border crisis and the 2021 Morocco-Spain border crises, this paper will argue that EU externalization and securitization actively shaped the political incentives of transit countries. In each case, transit states operated strategically within the EU’s framework of externalization. Dr. Achilli summarizes these occurrences aptly, asserting that the EU’s overwhelming state centric and security-based approach to migration empowers transit countries through the EU’s own fears over migration (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). The success of these instances of coercive engineered migration rests largely in the EU’s own framing of migration as first and foremost a matter of state security.

EU-Turkey Deal
At the height of the EU migration crisis in 2015, the EU and Turkey entered a historic deal in which Turkey agreed to accept the return of all migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece in exchange for a 6-billion-euro package and the reenergizing of EU accession negotiations and visa liberalization (Tagliapietra 2019). Additionally, known as the one-to-one formula, the deal stipulated that the EU would resettle one Syrian refugee from Turkey to the EU for every Syrian returned to Turkey from Greek islands (Aras 2019). The deal was unprecedented in terms of its absolute neglect of humanitarian concerns. Many migrants were detained, tear-gassed and returned to Turkey without due process. Despite its violations of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, specifically the principle of non-refoulement, the deal is often portrayed as an aberrant policy in a time of crisis (Crisp, Jeff, Personal Communication, April 7, 2023). These portals strategically evade grappling with how EU migration policy facilitates situations in which migrants are harnessed as political weapons.

Turkey’s ability to extract financial and political concessions from the EU rested on its ability to manipulate the flow of Syrian refugees entering the EU. Crucially, the EU was susceptible to this sort of coercive engineered migration strategy because of its preexisting securitized and externalized policies towards migration. This section will first trace the history of EU externalization policies in Turkey, before analyzing how these policies actively contributed to the success of Turkey’s use of coercive tactics to pressure the EU to act according to its demands.

EU externalization policy towards Turkey can be traced back to the Helsinki Summit of the European Council (1999), when the EU first officially recognized Turkey’s candidacy status (Taussig 2018). As part of its candidacy status, Turkey’s migration policies were increasingly shaped along the lines of EU demands. Initially, Turkey was incentivized to support EU external
border controls in exchange for capacity-building efforts, financial assistance, and visa exemptions (Aras 2019). Increasingly, EU externalization towards Turkey fell into two policy categories: paying Turkey to stop migration flows, and declaring Turkey a safe third country to which illegal migrants could be returned (Muftuler-Bac 2020). The EU’s expectation has been that transit countries, through border management and visa policy will act as the first line of “defense” against the EU (Aras 2019). In the case that these measures fail, countries such as Turkey are expected to readmit migrants.

Significantly, the EU’s demands towards Turkey increased dramatically after 2013, mainly through the passage of the 2013 Readmissions agreement, the 2015 Joint Action plan and the 2016 Refugee Statement (Muftuler-Bac 2020). Through these agreements, the EU extended control beyond the borders of its member states, shifting responsibility for preventing irregular migration onto Turkey (Aras 2019). As a result of these policies, Turkey can leverage its positionality as a gatekeeper between migration flows towards the EU. The drastic increase in irregular migration and asylum seekers in the EU following the Arab uprisings and Syrian conflict thus heightened Turkey’s position as a gatekeeper between migrants from the Middle East and Europe.

Rather than some aberrant policy, Turkey’s leveraging of Syrian refugee flows in the EU-Turkey deal should be understood against this history of EU externalization. After the European Parliament voted in 2016 to suspend accession talks with Turkey, President Erdogan stated that “when fifty thousand refugees were standing at your door, you cried out. I am serious when I say, if you go any further, these doors will be opened. You need to bear this in mind” (Aras 2019). Through externalization and securitization, the EU has shrunk migration policy to an issue of border security, while at the same time abdicating control over border management to
these third countries. By investing borders with physical and imagined significance, whilst at the same time externalizing control over borders to transit countries, the EU abdicates its control over migration to countries such as Turkey, allowing them to strategically manipulate the flow of migrants for political and economic gain.

Indeed, in 2016, Turkey began constructing a security wall along its border with Syria, which Aras refers to as “the most concrete effort by Turkey since 1999 to address EU demands for border management” (Aras 2019). In conjunction with Erdogan’s use of coercive engineered migration, the wall essentially allows Turkey to control the flow of migrants entering the EU from Syria, enabling him at any time to threaten to “open the doors.” According to Greenhill’s theory of Coercive engineered migration, opportunists exploit already existing migration flows for their own political gain (Greenhill, 2010). Although Erdogan played no direct role in the creation of the Syrian migration crises, he was able to harness Syrian mass migration as a tool for Turkish Statecraft vis-a-vis the EU. By threatening to open migration channels, Turkey secured six billion euros in funding from the EU. Significantly, Turkey’s demands in the deal, mainly the loosening of visa restrictions, remained entrenched within the EU’s long-standing externalization framework. The EU’s externalization and securitization of migration, based on a deep-seated fear over migration, explains how Erdogan was able to act as an opportunists in the deal, harnessing the EU’s own fears over unfettered migration to gain leverage in the negotiations.

Significantly, when Erdogan began acting as a coercer coincides with the moment the EU began framing Syrian mass migration as a “crises.” In these situations where migrants are harnessed as political weapons, the success of the tactic largely depends upon the coercer’s ability to depict refugees as an existential threat, playing on fears of migration present on the other side (Jennequin 2020). Dr Khalid Koser reiterates this notion, explaining that the logic
employed by Turkey was to use the EU’s own terror surrounding migration as a weapon against the Union (Koser, Khalid, Personal Communication, April 4, 2023). Through its externalization towards Turkey, the EU inadvertently empowered Turkey in the realm of migration diplomacy, actively contributing to the success of Erdogan’s coercive tactics. Although the deal was portrayed at the time as an unprecedented negotiation that constituted a change in the EU’s migration policy, (Kirisci 2021) this section has sought to contextualize Turkey’s strategy of coercive engineered migration, illustrating how the EU’s history of externalization and securitization actively contributed to Turkey’s ability to weaponize migration flows against the EU.

Morocco-Spain

Although much of the literature on coercive engineered migration focuses on the EU-Turkey deal, more recent examples of this tactic illustrate how EU externalization systematically incentivizes the logic of CEM. An analysis of the recent case of the weaponization of migrants on the border of Morocco and Spain provides further insight into the nexus between EU externalization and the coercive manipulation of migration by transit countries. This section will first outline the EU’s history of externalizing migration to Morocco, and then transition into a discussion of how these policies played an active role in the 2021 Ceuta border crisis.

Morocco, once a candidate for EU status, bears the brunt of EU externalization. EU externalization policies in Morocco make frequent use of the rhetoric of humanitarianism to defend and justify security-based policies. Much of the EU’s migration policies in Morocco are funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF 2022). Albeit with the stated goal of “addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa,” EU externalization policies towards Morocco have increasingly focused on border security at the
expense of humanitarian concerns. Since 2011, the EU has allocated close to 215 million in development funding towards strengthening border security in Morocco (Statewatch 2019). The EU’s disproportionate focus on border security in Morocco increased following the summer of 2018, as the Western Mediterranean route became the most frequently used migration route into Europe (EC 2020). The uptake in irregular migration from Morocco to Spain led the EU to increase its efforts to create bilateral migration agreements with Morocco, mainly in the form of readmission and return agreements (Torreblanca 2021).

Dr. Achilli, in his analysis of the EU’s development funding towards countries such as Morocco, went as far as to question if humanitarian aid and securitization have become two faces of the same coin. The EU is increasingly using humanitarian concerns to justify security-based policies (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). Dr Achilli contextualized this assertion, explaining that even prior to the EU-Turkey deal and Morocco-Spain border crisis, Europe was moving subtly towards securitization. Indeed, he cited the fact that the EU contributed more money towards Jordan and Lebanon for containment of the crisis in Syria than towards efforts aimed at absorbing refugees (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). In Morocco, the EU has similarly pursued containment under the guise of development.

Specifically, in 2018 the EU granted Morocco a 140-million-euro development budget for border security. The irony in EU policy towards Morocco lies in the fact that border security is not a development objective for Morocco, but merely a security objective for the EU (OXFAM 2017). Dr Mohamedou explains that Morocco has never asked the EU for funding for border security (Mohamedou, Mohamed, Personal Communication, April 5, 2023). A sole focus on border security diverts development funding from the objective of poverty eradication (Concord 2018). EU “development” policies towards countries like Morocco generate a narrative that
nations in the global south are at the whim of EU development funds. In these bilateral agreements to stave off migration towards the EU, EU policymakers stress short-term incentives on offer, such as development programmes and capacity building efforts, but significantly, these short-term offers do nothing to address the roots causes and drivers of migrations flows in the first place. Rather, they leave countries, such as Morocco, to deal with the brunt of migration (Uzalec).

The 2021 border incident between Morocco and Spain occurred on May 17 when between 6,000 to 8,000 people swam from Morocco into Ceuta (Greenhill 2021). Ceuta is an eight square mile Spanish enclave on Africa’s northern coast that lies within EU territory. Video footage shows Moroccan border guards opening fences to Ceuta and allowing people to cross in the Spanish enclave (Greenhill). The Spanish government responded with pushbacks, deploying border police at Ceuta’s main entry point (BBC 2021).

The border incident between Morocco and Spain occurred in the context of renewed tensions over claims over the Western Sahara (Sansanwal, Kamath 2020). Annexed by Morocco in 1975, the territory has since been disputed between the indigenous Sahawi people, led by the Polisario Front, and Morocco (Sansanwal, Kamath 2020). Specifically, the border incident occurred shortly after Spain admitted Brahim Ghali, the leader of the Polisario Front, for medical treatment in Spain. In her analysis of the event, Greenhill asserts that Moroccan authorities engineered the mass cross-border movement to punish and coerce Spain for its decision to treat Ghali (Greenhill 2021). Opposed to the EU-Turkey deal, in the case of the Ceuta incident, Moroccan authorities actively created a migration “crisis,” rather than simply harnessing their positionality as a transit country within EU externalization.
Morocco’s weaponization of migration in the 2021 Ceuta border crises challenges prevailing depictions of cooperation between the EU, Spain, and Morocco on migration. Whereas Morocco’s relationship with Europe is often analyzed through the lens of EU conditionality, which depicts Morocco as a passive and powerless recipient of EU funds, this recent case illustrates how transit countries make strategic use of their positionality within the framework of EU externalization. Lorena Gazzotti’s work illustrates how the EU’s logic on migration and aid is premised on the notion that the promise of additional aid can draw countries of “origin” and “transit” into closer cooperation with EU in containing irregular migration and border crossing (Gazzotti 2022). Countering the logic of conditionality, Morocco’s actions in the 2021 Morocco-Spain border incident illustrate how transit countries make use of their strategic position within EU policies, manipulating migration flows for political purposes.

To fully comprehend Moroccan authorities’ decision to use migration to punish and coerce its European counterparts, one must contextualize the Ceuta-Spain border crises within the larger history of EU externalization policy in Morocco and the history of lopsided relations between the EU and African countries. Recently, Spain has overtaken Italy as most popular entry point for migrants to travel to Europe. Since the majority of migrants arriving in Spain come from Morocco, the EU has been pushing for a deal that would see some migrants arriving in Spain via Morocco returned to Morocco (Uzelac 2019). Additionally, over the last few decades Morocco has gone from purely a transit country for sub-Saharan migrants to a destination. This is largely due to the closure of European borders, which has left Morocco to address the tens of thousands of migrants (Edwards 2021). Morocco’s decision to manipulate migration as a coercive tactic against Spain should be contextualized within EU and Spanish migration policy.
that has historically, through readmissions and inadequate development funding, left Morocco to deal with the brunt of migration from Africa.

Overall, this case illustrates how transit countries in the EU neighborhood are increasingly using the logic of securitization and externalization against the EU, harnessing the EU’s own fear over migration as a diplomatic weapon. This case illuminates the fragility of EU’s dependence on transit countries such as Morocco. This fragile balance is captured by Jose Torreblanca’s notion of connectivity wars (Torreblanca 2016). Torreblanca’s research focuses on how countries are increasingly using the interdependencies created as a result of globalization not to proser but as a weapon of war (Torreblanca 2016). Externalization creates a unique type of connectivity and dependency between the EU and transit countries. By externalizing responsibility over migration to Morocco and focusing almost entirely on building border capacity, Spain and the EU have made themselves vulnerable to this particular type of coercive engineered migration. In essence, because EU policy is wholly centered around closing borders, all a country like Morocco needs to do to punish or extract concessions from the EU is to simply threaten to open them.

**Belarus-Poland**

In the fall of 2021, Alexander Lukashenko, the authoritarian leader of Belarus, invited thousands of migrants and asylum seekers, primarily Kurds from Iraq and Syria, to Belarus, promising them easy access to the EU (Greenhill 2022). Migrants were then bused to Belarus’s western border and left in large and unprotected encampments. Despite the existence of numerous UN treaties and EU legislation designed to guarantee humanitarian protection for asylum seekers, border guards from Lithuania, Latvia and Poland employed tear gas, water cannons and rubber bullets to deter the refugees from crossing into the EU (Tondo 2022).
Poland’s response to the crisis involved fortifying its border, employed troops, and allowing border guards to expel migrants and reject asylum requests. These responses constitute a breach of international law and a violation of the principle of non-refoulement (Bekic 2022). Greenhill, in her analysis of the situation on the Polish border, explains that as a signatory to the Geneva Conventions and the European Convention on Human Rights, Poland’s pushbacks constitute a violation of international human rights law (Greenhill, 2021). Despite this, the crisis has been portrayed first and foremost as an issue of state security for Europe, rather than a humanitarian disaster; the responses by EU member states remain entrenched in the logic of externalization and securitization. The aim of this section is to trace how the EU’s securitized approach to migration actively shaped the environment in which Lukashenko was able to harness migration as a political weapon.

Similarly to the cases of Turkey and Morocco, Lukashenko aimed to manipulate the flow of migrants to punish and send a particular political message to the EU. In part, Lukashenko aimed to punish the EU for refusing to recognize him as the winner of the 2020 Belarusian presidential election, mainly on account of significant voter fraud and irregularities in election procedures (Greenhill 2022). Additionally, he hoped to pressure the EU to lift sanctions imposed on Belarus after Lukashenko suppressed the pro-democracy protests that followed his election (Greenhill 2022).

Significantly, only about 3,000 to 4,000 migrants were attempting to cross the border between Belarus and Poland (Hill 2021). These numbers don't represent a significant security threat to the EU bloc, but rather illustrate Poland and the EU’s overall unwillingness to resettle migrants, specifically those from the Middle East and Global South, within the EU. In this way, part of the power of Lukashenko’s strategy is that it calls attention to the hypocrisy at the heart of
EU migration policy and the gap between the EU’s purported commitment to liberal values and their illiberal policies towards migration. In her book, *Weapons of Mass Migration*, Greenhill details what she refers to as “hypocrisy costs” (Greenhill 2010). This refers to the real or perceived disparity existing between country’s professed commitment to liberal values and norms and demonstrated actions that go against these commitments. To avoid appearing hypocritical, countries like Poland justify their obvious breaches of international human rights law by framing migration as a security crisis instead of a humanitarian one. In doing so, they can mobilize military force, whilst in this case, framing countries like Belarus as unstable, irrational actors.

By playing on the EU’s fear-based approach to migration, Lukashenko was essentially able to frame 3,000 to 4,000 migrants as an existential threat to EU sovereignty and territorial integrity. Official statements and responses by EU members, by treating the coercive tactic as a “crisis”, gave power to Lukashenko’s rhetoric and techniques. A statement by President Von der Leyen on the situation at the border between Poland and Belarus referred to the “instrumentalisation of migrants for political purposes by Belarus” as “unacceptable.” EU diplomat Josep Borrell used the term “hybrid war” to refer to the coercive tactics employed by Lukashenko (BBC 2021). In addition to public statements condemning Lukashenko’s tactics, in December 2021 the European Commission presented a proposal for a regulation designed to address situations of instrumentalisation in the field of migrants and asylum (European Council 2021). These proposals enable Member States facing a situation of instrumentalisation to “immediately restrict border-crossing points and increase border surveillance”. They also include support for return agreements through cooperation with third countries, further externalizing the EU’s responsibility for addressing migration and the needs of refugees through agreements with
third countries (European Council 2021). These proposals focus largely on specific emergency migration mechanisms and asylum management procedures, but much like Europe’s historical approach to migration, do virtually nothing to address the root causes of migration and to privilege respect for human rights.

The EU’s official response to the Poland-Belarus crisis, compared to their response to the roughly 8 million Ukrainian refugees displaced across Europe since the beginning of the war, illustrates the degree to which securitization is constructed and used as a political tool by the EU. The aforementioned proposal, which came as a result of Lukashenko’s weaponization of migrants from the Middle East, varies drastically from the EU’s response to refugees from the Ukraine War. Dr Achilli explains that the EU activated the temporary protection directive, an EU emergency scheme used in exceptional circumstances of a mass influx to provide immediate and collective protection to displaced persons from Ukraine (Achilli, Luigi, Personal Communication, April 6, 2023). By granting Ukrainians temporary protection, they have benefited from expedited documentation, financial support, and residency, with the possibility of renewal for up to three years (Kirby 2022). A clear double standard emerges. Whereas 3,000 to 4,000 refugees, mainly from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, sent the EU into a state of paranoia, they have been willing and able to accommodate roughly 8 million refugees from Ukraine.

The Belarus-Poland border crises, much like the aforementioned two cases, illustrates how the EU’s policies of externalization and securitization actively contribute to the success of coercive engineered migration. Of course, this is not to say that Belarus’s actions are somehow excusable, but rather that the EU is actively benefiting from framing such crises as existential threats, evading the role that their policies play in shaping these incidents. Indeed, actors like Lukashenko can successfully harness migrants as weapons against the EU precisely because the
EU has already framed refugees as a threat to state security. The EU is deeply complicit in creating an imagined “migrant other,” who poses a security threat to Europe (Kabata 2022). According to the Copenhagen school, securitization is an intersubjective belief; there exists no security issues in and of themselves, but rather anything can be framed as one (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). Significantly, EU externalization policies, which are ineffective at managing long-term migration dynamics, actively contribute to the EU’s vulnerability to migration. It is exactly due to a lack of institutionalized procedures for dealing with migration internally and an ineffective burden-sharing responsibility for asylum seekers that the “EU encounters a deep crisis every time it experiences a considerable and abrupt migration influx” (Miholjcic 2022).

Actors like Lukashenko can successfully harness migrants as weapons against the EU precisely because the EU has already framed refugees as a threat to state security. EU externalization of migration treats human beings in transactional terms (Mohamedou, Mohamed, Personal Communication, April 5, 2023). Coercive engineered migration is therefore a strategy deployed by countries at the receiving end of EU externalization policy that is effective precisely because it speaks in the language that the EU is already operating under. This new phase of “contested externalization,” (Laube 2021) turns the logic of securitization against the EU. The success or failure of this instances of coercive engineered migrations hinges on the perceptions surrounding migration in the targeted countries. Indeed, as Greenhill explains, weaponized migration has succeeded in cases with only tens of people and failed in cases involving millions. The size of the threat is overall less important than the underlying dynamics that inform securitization.

Conclusion
Although framed by the EU as a string of external migration crises, recent cases in which migrants were harnessed as coercive tools by transit countries against the EU must be understood within the context of the EU’s policies of externalization and securitization. The current study has sought to analyze how EU externalization policies are built around an underlying anxiety and fear over migration. Externalization is largely a policy by which the EU justifies its fear-ridden approach to migration through appeals to humanitarianism. Understudied in the literature on securitization and externalization, are the political calculations of countries such as Morocco, Belarus, and Turkey that are at the other end of these externalization policies. Rather than passive recipients of EU externalization, these countries are increasingly acknowledging that fears over migration are a weak point for the EU. Thus, the threat of “unleashing” migration flows, as well as the promise of detaining migrants outside of the EU becomes a politically powerful diplomatic tool, one that allows these transit countries to extract increasingly valuable concessions from the EU.

Moving forward, the EU should consider the ways its migration policies actively shape the political environment in which the weaponization of migration successfully occurs. By externalizing the responsibility for migration to these third countries, the EU has actively contributed to the success of these attempts. As illustrated recurrently, Europeans securitized, fear-based approach to handling migration frames refugees and migrants in transactional terms. These coercive engineered migration attempts build upon this logic, weaponizing migrants in a way that resonates powerfully with the EU. To overcome this, the EU must work to reinfuse their migration policies with concerns for human security. As has been illustrated throughout this paper, security is constructed. Migration is not the first issue to be securitized in this way. In the past, there have been other policy areas that have been successfully de-securitized, such as the
politics around AIDS (Koser, Khalid, Personal Communication, April 4, 2023). That said, Europe has now moved so far away from a narrative of human rights to one of state security, to the point that migration is not even merely securitized, but militarized (Mohamedou, Mohamed, Personal Communication, April 5, 2023). To reverse the momentum of these dangerous trends, politicians and lawmakers in Europe must realize that securitization, despite the imagine of creating a “fortress Europe,” is weakening the EU by exposing the deep-seated hypocrisy between the Unions purported commitment to liberal, democratic norms and its recent policies and actions towards migration.
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