

GREECE AND THE EVROS BORDER: SECURITY, RIGHTS AND RELATIONS WITH TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the Evros River border, which separates Greece from Turkey, as one of the main areas of tension in the European Union's migration and security policy. This region has become a symbol of the securitization of European borders, where controlling irregular migration is often prioritized over protecting human rights. After the 2015 migration crisis, when Turkey announced the opening of its borders, Greece significantly strengthened security measures in Evros, including the construction of fences, the use of surveillance technologies, and an increased military and police presence. These measures reflect a security narrative that frames migration as a threat to national sovereignty and stability. At the same time, reports of human rights violations, such as illegal returns, arbitrary detentions, and excessive use of force, have multiplied, raising serious questions about the compatibility of Greek and European policies with international law and European Union law. The analysis is based on official European Union documents, reports from human rights organizations, and the international legal framework applicable to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. The article argues that Evros functions not only as a border for containing migration, but also as a functional space of exception, in which restrictive and legally ambiguous practices tend to be normalized in the name of European stability and security. It further argues that this model is reinforced by the European Union's political, financial, and operational

support to Greece, as part of a logic of outsourcing and delegating migration governance to peripheral states. Thus, the case of Evros highlights a structural mismatch between security imperatives, geopolitical interests, and legal commitments, revealing the internal contradictions of the European project in the management of its external borders.

Keywords: European Union, securitization, migration, human rights, border, Evros

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a fronteira do rio Evros, que separa a Grécia da Turquia, enquanto uma das principais áreas de tensão da política migratória e de segurança da União Europeia. Esta região tornou-se um símbolo da securitização das fronteiras europeias, onde o controlo da migração irregular é frequentemente priorizado em detrimento da proteção dos direitos humanos. Após a crise migratória de 2015, quando a Turquia anunciou a abertura das suas fronteiras, a Grécia reforçou significativamente as medidas de segurança em Evros, incluindo a construção de barreiras físicas, a utilização de tecnologias de vigilância e o aumento da presença militar e policial. Estas medidas refletem uma narrativa securitária que enquadra a migração como uma ameaça à soberania nacional e à estabilidade. Simultaneamente, multiplicaram-se os relatos de violações de direitos humanos, tais como devoluções ilegais, detenções arbitrárias e uso excessivo da força, suscitando sérias questões quanto à compatibilidade das políticas gregas e europeias com o direito internacional e o direito da União Europeia. A análise baseia-se em documentos oficiais da União Europeia, relatórios de organizações de direitos humanos e no quadro jurídico internacional aplicável à proteção de refugiados e requerentes de asilo. O artigo sustenta que Evros funciona não apenas como uma fronteira de contenção migratória, mas também como um espaço funcional de

exceção, no qual práticas restritivas e juridicamente ambíguas tendem a ser normalizadas em nome da estabilidade e segurança europeias. Defende-se ainda que este modelo é reforçado pelo apoio político, financeiro e operacional da União Europeia à Grécia, no âmbito de uma lógica de externalização e delegação da governação migratória para os Estados periféricos. Deste modo, o caso de Evros evidencia um desfasamento estrutural entre imperativos securitários, interesses geopolíticos e compromissos jurídicos, revelando as contradições internas do projeto europeu na gestão das suas fronteiras externas.

Palavras-chave: União Europeia; securitização; migração; direitos humanos; fronteira; Evros.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study addresses the topic “Greece and the Evros border: securitisation, rights and relations with Turkey”; to this end, it is essential to understand the political context between Greece and Turkey, and consequently the issues that shape this landscape, such as migration and, more specifically, the migration crisis. By deepening our understanding of the Greek approach to the migration crisis, this research describes and justifies the rationale behind the securitisation of Greece’s migration policy. A state which, due to its geographical location, is, in the first instance, more exposed to migration flows from North Africa and the Middle East.

The Evros River border, which forms a significant part of the land border between Greece and Turkey, is one of the main points of contact between Europe and the Middle East. This territory constitutes both the EU’s external border and

Greece's eastern border, and holds particular geostrategic importance in the context of contemporary European migration management. The Evros is a highly sensitive area, both politically and operationally, and is frequently identified as one of the most critical areas in terms of border surveillance and the control of irregular migration flows (Triandafyllidou, 2020, p. 559).

In recent years, mounting migratory pressures and the worsening humanitarian crises in the Middle East, Asia and North Africa have placed this border at the centre of the European debate on security and human rights. The response of Greece, and by extension the EU, has been characterised by an increasing securitisation of border policies, reflected in the strengthening of surveillance mechanisms, the construction of physical barriers and the intensification of the military presence in the region (Bialasiewicz, 2012, p. 843). This process reflects the tendency to frame migration not merely as a social or humanitarian phenomenon, but as a matter of national security and the defence of the European space.

The significance of the Evros is further underscored by the complex relations between Greece and Turkey, in which border management plays a central role. Turkey, as a transit country and signatory to the 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement, plays an ambiguous role: on the one hand, it acts as a barrier to migrants entering Europe; on the other, it has used migration control as a tool for exerting political and diplomatic pressure on the EU (Kasperek, 2016, p. 59). In this way, the Evros border

emerges as a symbolic and material space where dynamics of power, security and human rights intersect, reflecting the broader tensions between containment policies and humanitarian obligations within the European project.

Beyond its regional impact, the Evros case reveals a broader dimension of European migration control policy, characterised by the increasing externalisation of borders and the transfer of migration management to third countries. This trend, which aims to contain migration flows outside European territory, has raised serious ethical and legal questions regarding the EU's international responsibility for the protection of human rights (Moreno-Lax, 2018). At the same time, the strengthening of surveillance infrastructure and the use of control technologies such as drones, thermal sensors and biometric systems reflect a logic of 'security governance' that extends beyond the physical space of the Evros, forming part of a broader paradigm of the Europeanisation of borders (Guild, 2021). The Evros border is not limited to the Greek or Turkish context, but also allows for an analysis of the internal contradictions within the European project between the defence of its borders and the commitment to the universal principles of human dignity and solidarity. Despite the extensive literature on the securitisation of migration, there remains a lack of integrated analysis of the Evros as a space that is simultaneously militarised, legally ambiguous and geopolitically instrumentalised, a gap that this article seeks to fill.

In order to achieve the intended aim, it is essential to clearly identify and define the General Objective (GO) and the Central Question (CQ), which are presented, together with the Sub-Questions (SQ), in Table 1:

GENERAL OBJECTIVE		
To analyse Greece's border control policy on the Evros River, assessing the impact of its securitisation, the consequences for human rights, and the influence of geopolitical relations with Turkey and the European Union.		
CENTRAL QUESTION		
How do border policies (such as walls and surveillance) balance human rights obligations with security pressures and geopolitical considerations?		
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1 (SO1)	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2 (SO2)	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3 (SO3)
To understand the border control measures implemented by Greece at the Evros border.	To analyse border control practices and how they affect respect for human rights and international law.	To assess and understand how the geopolitical interests of Greece and the EU influence the formulation of border policy.
SUB-QUESTION 1 (SQ1)	SUB-QUESTION 2 (SQ2)	SUB-QUESTION 3 (SQ3)
What are the main border control measures implemented by Greece at the Evros border?	To what extent do border control practices affect respect for human rights and international law?	How do the geopolitical interests of Greece and the EU influence the formulation of border policy?

Table 1. Central Question, Specific Objectives and sub-question
Source. Compiled by the authors.

Despite the extensive existing literature on the securitisation of migration and the governance of the European Union's external borders, there remains a persistent

gap in the integrated analysis of the Evros border as a space where intensive militarisation, legal ambiguity and geopolitical instrumentalisation intersect in an inseparable manner. This study seeks to address this gap by going beyond a mere description of migration flows, proposing a multidimensional analysis that links Greek domestic policy with structural support from the EU and strategic pressure from Turkey.

The scientific contribution of this article lies in its conceptualisation of the Evros as a ‘functional space of exception’. By analysing the period between 2015 and 2024, with a focus on the 2020 crisis, this study adds to the state of the art by demonstrating that securitisation in this region does not constitute a one-off reaction or an operational deviation, but rather an institutionalised strategic process supported by European structures. In this way, the research offers a new analytical depth to the debate on the erosion of international refugee protection regimes in the face of the consolidation of ‘governance by containment’ at Europe’s peripheral borders.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the Evros border forms part of a broader field of research on the securitisation of migration, the governance of the EU’s external borders, the international protection of refugees, and the geopolitical dynamics between Greece, Turkey and the EU itself. The literature on the securitisation of migration emphasises

that, since the end of the Cold War and, with greater intensity following the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, migratory flows have increasingly been portrayed as threats to internal order, national identity and state security. Within this theoretical framework, migration ceases to be merely a socio-economic and humanitarian phenomenon and is reframed as a security issue, legitimising exceptional measures such as the expanded use of military forces, the construction of walls and the intensive use of surveillance technology.

In the European context, several authors demonstrate how this logic plays out at the EU’s external borders. Triandafyllidou (2020) highlights that the so-called ‘migration crisis’ of 2015 acted as a catalyst for the strengthening of control and containment policies, underscoring the central role of border countries, such as Greece, in the European migration management framework. These approaches allow us to understand the Evros not merely as a territorial boundary between two states, but as a strategic node in a broader system of border governance, in which the EU projects the containment of migration flows beyond its formal borders.

The literature on the externalisation of migration control explores this perspective in greater depth. Kasparek (2016) describes how the Dublin System and associated European policies redistribute responsibilities amongst Member States, placing a disproportionate burden on countries of first entry, such as Greece, whilst encouraging practices aimed at containing and turning away people on the move.

Moreno-Lax (2018) critically discusses the EU's international responsibility in the externalisation of borders, arguing that the transfer of control functions to third countries and to agencies such as Frontex cannot be used to dilute legal obligations regarding human rights and refugee protection. Den Heijer (2012), from a similar perspective, explores the limits of European jurisdiction and the issue of extraterritorial asylum, showing that, even when control takes place outside the EU's traditional territory, protection standards remain applicable. These contributions are particularly relevant to the Evros region, where the presence of Frontex and cooperation with Turkey illustrate precisely the mobile and externalised border described by the authors.

Frontex's activities have also come under increasing scrutiny in academic literature and institutional reports. Investigations by the European Parliament and the European Anti-Fraud Office indicate that the agency was aware of alleged pushbacks (European Parliament, 2021, p. 192) carried out by the Greek authorities and, in some cases, failed to take effective measures to prevent or report them, raising questions about its direct or indirect responsibility for the documented violations. This debate forms part of a wider discussion on the accountability of European agencies and the need for robust mechanisms of democratic and legal oversight of border control. The Evros border emerges, in this context, as a paradigmatic example

of the difficulties in reconciling the logic of security and control with the legal obligation to protect people in vulnerable situations.

Finally, the literature on Greek-Turkish relations and regional geopolitics helps us to understand the Evros region as an arena of strategic rivalry and a tool for exerting political pressure. Turkey, as a transit country and an EU partner under the 2016 Agreement, is often portrayed as an ambivalent actor: simultaneously a barrier and a passageway for migrants. Studies on the instrumentalisation of migration show how Ankara uses migratory flows as a means of putting pressure on the EU at times of diplomatic tension, framing migration as a geopolitical resource. In response, Greece reinforces its rhetoric of threat and adopts heightened security measures, presenting itself as Europe's 'shield' in the defence of external borders, which reinforces the domestic and European legitimacy of the policies of militarisation of the Evros.

In summary, the existing literature reveals three main strands that form the theoretical framework of this study: the securitisation of migration as a discursive process that legitimises exceptional measures; the externalisation and technologisation of European border control, with particular focus on Greece's land and sea borders; and the persistent tension between security, geopolitics and human rights, evident in practices that directly challenge the international refugee protection regime. It is at this theoretical intersection that the Evros border becomes a

particularly relevant case for analysing how national and European migration control policies produce a border space that is simultaneously securitised, legally ambiguous and politically instrumentalised.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach of an exploratory and analytically interpretative nature, suited to the study of complex phenomena such as border securitisation, state action and the impact of migration policies on human rights.

Set within a constructivist epistemological framework, this approach is based on the assumption that perceptions of threat, political discourses and institutional practices shape the way in which states define and respond to security challenges, making a contextual interpretation of the Evros case essential. To understand this process, a case study was developed focusing on the period between 2015 and 2024, with particular emphasis on the 2020 crisis, a time when border control measures intensified and reports of human rights violations multiplied. Data collection was based exclusively on documentary analysis, including official reports from the EU, the UN, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Frontex, Greek and European legislation, government communiqués from both states involved, journalistic investigations of recognised credibility, reports from non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch

and the ECCHR, as well as relevant academic literature on securitisation, border governance and the geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean. These documents were selected on the basis of thematic relevance, institutional credibility, topicality and a plurality of perspectives, in order to ensure a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the political and security dynamics associated with the Evros.

The data analysis followed a thematic coding approach that enabled the identification of discursive and operational patterns relating to securitisation, technological surveillance, militarisation, pushback practices, the impact on international law and human rights, and the geopolitical influences of Greece, Turkey and the EU itself. In order to ensure the analytical rigour and replicability of the study, data processing followed a qualitative content analysis approach, structured in three distinct phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and processing of the results.

3.1. ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES AND CODING CRITERIA

The analysis was structured around four key analytical categories, derived from the theoretical framework of securitisation and the externalisation of borders:

- a. Discursive Dimension (Securitisation): Focused on identifying speech acts that frame migration as an ‘existential threat’, ‘hybrid war’ or a risk to sovereignty. The coding criteria included the selection of keywords and

metaphors (e.g. ‘Europe’s shield’) in official speeches and government statements.

- b. Operational Dimension (Militarisation and Technology): Categorisation of the physical and technological measures implemented, such as the length of the wall, the use of drones, thermal sensors and AI systems. The analysis focused on the role these measures play in ‘governance through containment’.
- c. Legal and Normative Dimension (Human Rights): Identification of patterns of violations of international standards, specifically the principle of non-refoulement and the right to asylum. The analysis was based on a comparison of reports from NGOs (Amnesty, HRW) with the legal framework of the Geneva Convention and the ECHR.
- d. Geopolitical Dimension: An analysis of the power dynamics between Greece, Turkey and the EU, examining instances where migration flows have been exploited as tools of coercive diplomacy.

3.2. PROCESSING LOGIC AND INFERENCE

The approach to data analysis was inductive-deductive. We started from the theoretical concepts of ‘space of exception’ and ‘securitisation’ to examine the documents (deduction), whilst the patterns emerging from field reports (such as the normalisation of pushbacks) allowed us to refine our interpretation of the erosion of

the refugee protection system (induction). This cross-referencing of sources (documentary triangulation) enabled us to validate the inferences regarding the imbalance between security imperatives and human rights obligations at the Evros border.

The subsequent analysis was interpreted in the light of securitisation theory and studies on the externalisation of European borders, enabling a link to be drawn between the discursive construction of migration as a threat and the operational measures implemented on the ground; this process provided an understanding of the consolidation of the Evros border as a highly securitised and legally ambiguous space, where exceptional practices are normalised in the name of territorial defence.

The analysis of these exceptional practices was framed by the way in which the Evros border is politically constructed as a space of existential threat, in which irregular migration is portrayed as an instrument of geopolitical pressure and hybrid warfare. This securitised framework legitimises the adoption of extraordinary measures that deviate from ordinary legal standards, subordinating the application of the right to asylum and procedural safeguards to imperatives of containment and deterrence.

The militarisation of the border, characterised by a heavy military presence, the use of advanced surveillance technology and the construction of physical containment infrastructure.

The EU's role as a key architect of this regime of exception was based on the assumption that the political, financial and operational support provided to Greece is not merely intended to strengthen administrative capacities, but functions as a mechanism of governance through external containment, by means of which the EU seeks to prevent migratory flows from reaching its legal territory. This strategy allows the EU to formally reconcile its commitment to human rights with the practical implementation of deterrence policies, creating a zone of legal ambiguity and diffuse accountability in which illegal practices can persist without effective institutional challenge.

However, the study acknowledges certain inherent limitations: the impossibility of collecting data directly in the field, due to the region's military and political sensitivity, and the potential bias of the available sources—whether governmental or from humanitarian organisations—constitute significant constraints; nevertheless, the methodological procedures adopted ensure rigour, consistency and interpretative soundness, allowing for an in-depth analysis of how Greek border policy seeks to balance—or frequently unbalance—security requirements, international obligations and geopolitical interests within the contemporary European context.

4. ASSESS THE MAIN BORDER CONTROL MEASURES IMPLEMENTED BY GREECE AT THE EVROS BORDER

In addition to the entry points located on the islands, there is also the Evros border in the north of Greece, where the river of the same name marks the land border between Greece and Turkey; this area has, in turn, been the scene of humanitarian disasters that have attracted international media attention.

Of all the measures implemented by the Greek Government in tackling the migration crisis, the one that represented the most immediate response was probably the tightening of border controls, both on the islands and on the mainland (Kathimerini, 2016, p. 243). Greece has invested heavily in strengthening surveillance along the Evros border, a key hotspot for the EU in recent times. One of the most striking measures is the construction and extension of a metal fence, which already stretches for many kilometres and continues to expand. In 2025, the Greek government announced plans to extend this structure even further, with the aim of “protecting national and European borders” (Ekathimerini, 2025, p. 172). At the same time, state-of-the-art surveillance technology has been implemented, including drones, thermal cameras, motion sensors and artificial intelligence systems, enabling constant monitoring.

The border has become a model of a ‘smart border’ in Europe; as a result, the presence of security and military forces has also increased significantly, often in

cooperation with the European agency Frontex, which provides support in the form of personnel.

Greece has also stepped up controls at official border crossings and accelerated the return of migrants to Turkey. These exceptional measures took the form of operational reinforcements of police, coastguard and border guard personnel, with the aim of increasing surveillance and preventing illegal entries, resulting in controls that were more systematic and rigorous than before. Another factor contributing to increased border surveillance – particularly given that Greece is a country with an extensive coastline – was the increase in maritime patrols and Coast Guard operations in the Aegean Sea, aimed at intercepting vessels before they reached Greek territory (Tsourapas & Zartaloudis, 2022, p. 1292).

Although these measures enhance security, they have sparked controversy regarding their compliance with international law and humanitarian standards.

5. TO ASSESS THE EXTENT TO WHICH BORDER CONTROL PRACTICES AFFECT RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Border control practices in the Evros River region have resulted in numerous human rights violations against migrants and asylum seekers. As a country of entry

into the EU, Greece faces significant migratory pressure, but the state's responses have frequently undermined human dignity and the right to protection.

Reports by international organisations and NGOs (Amnesty International, 2022, p. 78) highlight degrading reception conditions, excessive use of force, pushbacks and arbitrary detentions – practices that violate the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights.

5.1. INTERNATIONAL LAW

The border control practices implemented by Greece in the Evros River region have raised serious concerns under international law, technological and physical surveillance measures such as the border wall, the use of drones, thermal sensors and automated detection systems, although justified by the Greek government on the grounds of national security, have contributed to an environment of militarisation that hinders the exercise of the right to seek asylum. This situation has frequently resulted in violations of fundamental international standards, notably the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in Article 33 of the 1951 Geneva Convention and Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which expressly recognises the right to asylum in accordance with the Geneva Convention and EU law. Another critical issue is the European Union's shared responsibility, particularly through Frontex. Investigations by the European

Parliament and the European Anti-Fraud Office have revealed that Frontex was aware of pushback practices carried out by Greek authorities and, in some cases, failed to report them or take action to prevent them. Such omission may constitute institutional complicity, in breach of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which enshrines respect for human rights and human dignity as fundamental values of the Union (Amnesty International, 2020, p. 83). From a legal perspective, such conduct challenges the balance between the sovereign right of states to control their borders and the international obligation to protect people in vulnerable situations. Greece's actions, although taking place against a backdrop of intense migratory pressure and security concerns, highlight the European tendency to prioritise territorial containment over legal protection, reflecting a restrictive interpretation of international instruments for the protection of refugees.

In a broader sense, the Evros case reveals the gradual erosion of the international refugee protection system and the transformation of European borders into spaces of 'legal exception' (Agamben, 2023, p. 18), where human rights standards are frequently subordinated to security imperatives. This phenomenon not only undermines the European Union's credibility as a promoter of the values of the rule of law, but also weakens the international normative architecture established after the Second World War.

5.2. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW AND ASYLUM LAW

The border control measures implemented by Greece have raised serious concerns regarding human rights and international law. According to various reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the Greek authorities have carried out numerous pushbacks, and this type of practice violates the right to dignity, protection and safety under the European Convention on Human Rights.

These practices, in addition to directly affecting individuals, also contravene international law, as the Geneva Convention enshrines the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits sending anyone to a country where they may face persecution or ill-treatment. By militarising and strictly controlling the border, Greece ultimately limits access to international protection and undermines respect for its legal obligations; thus, even with the aim of ensuring national security, these measures have contributed to human rights violations and breaches of international law, revealing a clear imbalance between border security and the protection of people (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2020).

6. THE GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS OF GREECE AND THE EU, AND HOW THEY INFLUENCE THE FORMULATION OF BORDER POLICY

From a geopolitical perspective, Greece occupies a strategic position in south-eastern Europe, serving as a gateway to the Schengen Area. The Schengen Area is one of the key achievements of European integration, symbolising the creation of an area of free movement of people within the European Union and certain associated countries. As a physical barrier between the European Union itself and the Middle East. This location gives the country a dual role: on the one hand, Greece is Europe's border and guardian; on the other, it is also a pressure zone, subject to intense migratory flows and diplomatic tensions with Turkey. In view of this, the Greek government tends to adopt border securitisation policies, presenting migration control as a matter of national security and European defence. This narrative legitimises both the reinforcement of the armed forces and police and the use of surveillance technologies and physical barriers along the River Evros (Commission, 2020). Relations with Turkey are another central element in the formulation of border policies. The historical disputes between the two countries involving the Aegean Sea and migration control intensify the geopolitical nature of the border. Turkey has been accused by Greece and the EU of exploiting migration flows as a means of political pressure, particularly following the collapse of the 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement, which provided for joint control of migration routes. Thus, the

Evros border has become a space of symbolic and political contention, where the control of migration flows is intertwined with power politics and regional rivalries.

On the European Union's side, geopolitical interests centre on preserving the bloc's security and internal cohesion. The EU seeks to prevent migration crises from causing political instability among member states and fuelling populist and anti-European movements. Consequently, the Union tends to externalise border control, supporting peripheral countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain to stem migration flows before they reach the interior of the continent. This strategy is manifested through substantial funding, technical support and operational cooperation with Frontex, the European agency responsible for the surveillance of external borders (Frontex, 2021).

Consequently, the formulation of Greek border policy in the Evros region reflects a strategic interdependence: Greece relies on the European Union's political and financial support to manage migration flows, whilst the EU relies on Greece to maintain the credibility of its external borders and the stability of the Schengen area. This relationship, however, also creates tensions. EU pressure for greater efficiency in migration control often encourages practices that conflict with international human rights obligations, such as pushbacks and arbitrary detentions. Thus, Greek border policies in Evros result from an unstable balance between security interests, sovereignty and international legitimacy. The border becomes a space where

European geopolitics materialises, revealing the contradictions between the humanitarian values proclaimed by the European Union and the security practices adopted to defend its borders. In this context, the Evros symbolises not only a territorial line, but also a moral and political boundary that defines how far Europe is willing to go to protect itself, even if this means compromising human rights and the very international law that underpins it (UNHCR, 2020).

7. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

7.1. ANALYTICAL IMPLEMENTATION MODEL: SECURITISATION IN THE EVROS REGION

The securitisation process in the Evros region is led by the securitising actor (the Greek State), which, through rhetoric of “hybrid war” and ‘existential threat’, convinces its audience (both domestic and European) of the need for extraordinary measures, such as pushbacks and the suspension of asylum, thereby transforming the border into a space of legal exception.

7.2. MEASURES ADOPTED BY GREECE

The measures adopted by Greece since 2015, and particularly intensified following the 2020 migration crisis, reveal a structural transformation of the Evros border, which has become a veritable testing ground for territorial control policies. In this space, the logic of security tends to systematically prevail over the protection

of human rights, creating a scenario in which irregular migration is framed as an existential threat: “Security is articulated through the construction of migration as an existential threat” (Bialasiewicz, 2012, p. 843). This interpretation should not be understood merely as an operational response to migratory flows, but as a political and discursive process that justifies the adoption of exceptional practices and increasingly intrusive control mechanisms.

The intensification of physical infrastructure—notably the expansion of the metal fence and the growing use of drones, thermal sensors and artificial intelligence systems - illustrates the shift from a traditional model of border control to a regime of permanent, technology-assisted surveillance. This development is consistent with the perspective of authors such as Bialasiewicz (2012), who describe the contemporary European border as a dynamic mechanism for filtering and monitoring. In this sense, the construction of a ‘smart border’ in Evros represents not only a police reinforcement, but the consolidation of a securitised governance that transcends physical space, extending to databases, biometric systems and mechanisms of continuous aerial surveillance.

Documented practices of summary returns, excessive use of force and the denial of access to asylum reveal a serious departure from obligations under international law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in the 1951 Geneva Convention. Frontex’s actions, which are frequently the subject of criticism

and investigations for alleged complicity or negligence, highlight this tension between security and legality. Although the agency was established to ensure compliance with border regulations, it finds itself at the centre of allegations regarding tolerance of, or even indirect participation in, pushback practices. This contradiction highlights the gap between the normative values proclaimed by the EU and the practices that have, in fact, been implemented at its external borders. On a geopolitical level, Turkey's role is essential to understanding the securitisation observed in Evros. In 2020, by announcing the opening of the borders, Ankara used migration flows as a tool for exerting diplomatic pressure on Greece and on the EU itself. This move highlighted Europe's strategic vulnerability resulting from its dependence on third countries for migration containment. The Greek response, which included the mobilisation of the armed forces, the militarisation of the border and the temporary suspension of the right to asylum, demonstrates how geopolitical pressures can justify extraordinary measures that directly challenge the European legal framework and the principles of international protection.

Three deeply intertwined dimensions emerge from this process: security, human rights and geopolitics. The security-driven approach cannot be explained solely by the perception of internal risk, but also by a strategic calculation that prioritises stability and the containment of migration, often at the expense of respect for international law. The European Union's political and financial support for Greek

actions reinforces a management model that prioritises safeguarding the Schengen area, despite challenges from international organisations regarding its legality. As a result, the Evros border has become a zone of legal exception, where illegal practices are tolerated or even normalised, provided they fit within the narrative of defence against an external threat.

In the domestic Greek context, this process reinforces the government's legitimacy, particularly at times of tension with Turkey. The use of rhetoric portraying migrants as instruments of 'hybrid warfare', which was widely disseminated in 2020, has enabled a humanitarian crisis to be framed as a matter of national security. This narrative serves to justify extraordinary measures and reinforce the perception of the Evros as a symbol of Greek sovereignty and the defence of Europe's borders.

Through this analysis, it is possible to demonstrate that the securitisation of the Evros is not merely a one-off reaction to specific events, but rather a strategic, institutionalised process supported by European structures, whose impact on human rights must be understood as a direct consequence of the political architecture put in place, rather than as mere operational deviations. Through this analysis and reports from international organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ECCHR and the Aegean Boat Report, it has been possible to deduce data regarding the number of pushbacks.

Although there are no systematic official statistics on pushbacks, numerous reports from international organisations and NGOs agree that these practices intensified throughout 2020.

8. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the results demonstrates that the Evros border is not merely a geographical boundary, but the outcome of a successful process of securitisation, where migration has been effectively shifted from political and humanitarian spheres to those of national security and existential survival. By linking the theoretical framework with the empirical data, three key axes emerge that underpin the scientific contribution of this study.

8.1. THE SPEECH ACT AND THE MATERIALISATION OF THE EXCEPTION

As posited by securitisation theory, the discursive framing of migration as a ‘hybrid war’ and of Greece as the ‘shield of Europe’ functioned as a legitimising speech act. This rhetoric, which constructs migration as an existential threat, aligns with the perspective of Bialasiewicz (2012), who describes the contemporary European border as a dynamic mechanism for filtering and monitoring. This discourse has materialised in the temporary suspension of the right to asylum and the implementation of a ‘smart border’, where technology (drones, AI, sensors) and the

physical barrier act as material extensions of the security imperative, overriding ordinary standards of international protection.

8.2. THE EVROS AS A ‘FUNCTIONAL SPACE OF EXCEPTION’

Applying Agamben’s (2005) concept to the empirical findings leads to the conclusion that the Evros border has established itself as a space of institutionalised legal exception. The normalisation of pushbacks and the institutional acceptance of violent containment practices, documented by organisations such as Amnesty International (2021, 2022) and Human Rights Watch (2021), demonstrate that, in this zone, the rule of law is suspended in the name of ‘European stability’. This exception is not an accidental deviation, but a structural feature of contemporary border governance, where the lives of migrants are placed in a zone of legal indeterminacy. The omission of Frontex regarding these practices, as highlighted in European Parliament (2021) reports, further reinforces the systemic nature of this regime of exception.

8.3. OUTSOURCING AND DIFFUSE LIABILITY

The findings corroborate the literature on the externalisation of Europe’s borders, notably the studies by Kasparek (2016) on the Dublin System and the redistribution of responsibilities within the European migration regime. The interdependence between Greece and the EU reveals a ‘geometry of convenience’: Greece assumes the role of physical containment and bears the cost of legal

ambiguity, while the EU provides financial and operational support via Frontex, maintaining a normative distance that allows it to formally preserve its commitment to human rights. This paradigm of ‘rescue-without-protection’, discussed by Moreno-Lax (2018), is exacerbated by Turkey’s instrumentalisation of migration flows, which acts as the catalyst validating forceful measures as necessary defensive responses.

In short, the analysis reveals a structural imbalance where geopolitical interests and short-term security imperatives undermine long-term legal commitments. The Evros River thus becomes a symbol of a European project which, in seeking to protect its internal space of freedom, ends up creating peripheral spaces of exclusion and normative violence.

9. CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the Evros land border has established itself as one of the most sensitive and strategic areas in European migration control policy, playing a central role in the interplay between security, sovereignty and regional geopolitics. Greece, as a Member State of the European Union situated in a peripheral and exposed position, has framed the management of this border within a predominantly security-based logic, in which irregular migration

is perceived as a risk factor for national stability and the integrity of the Schengen area.

The findings show that the border policy adopted in the Evros region prioritises deterrence and territorial containment, integrating physical, technological and military measures into a security-based model of border governance. Although this strategic approach contributes to strengthening control and surveillance capabilities, it reveals significant limitations when it comes to reconciling operational effectiveness with compliance with international legal obligations, particularly regarding access to the right to asylum and the protection of vulnerable persons.

The geopolitical dimension emerges as a key factor in the formulation of these policies. Relations with Turkey, marked by historical rivalries and instances of the exploitation of migration flows, reinforce the perception of a threat and, from a political and strategic standpoint, justify the adoption of exceptional measures. At the same time, the European Union's political, financial and operational support for Greece contributes to the consolidation of a model for managing external borders based on the externalisation and delegation of migration control to peripheral states, with a direct impact on the European regulatory framework.

In this way, the case of the Evros highlights a structural imbalance between security imperatives, geopolitical interests and legal commitments, transforming the

border into a functional space of exception, where restrictive practices tend to become the norm in the name of stability and territorial defence. This dynamic reveals the internal contradictions of the European project, which seeks simultaneously to assert itself as an area of freedom, security and justice, and to ensure the effective protection of its external borders.

More broadly, this study contributes to an understanding of contemporary borders as multifunctional strategic spaces, where migration policy intersects directly with security and defence. The future challenge for Greece and the European Union lies in developing models of border governance capable of ensuring territorial protection and regional stability without compromising the legal and normative credibility that underpins European legitimacy within the international system.

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