

## **Die Herstellung von Sicherheit an der EU-Außengrenze. Migrations- und Grenzpolitik in der polnischen Region Karpatenvorland**

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For scholars interested in the process of (re)bordering and its impact on human subjects, there is hardly any other region in the world that proves to be a more enriching object of research than that of Eastern Europe. On the one hand, frequently shifting borders, repeatedly ruthlessly furrowing through this dense patchwork of ethnic groups, multiple liquid identities, as well as linguistic amalgamations and social classes, have been historically interwoven with the rise and demise of regional empires (and the related "bloodlandization" of the terrain, especially under the two totalitarian regimes). On the other hand, they have been inextricably linked with the homogenizing pressure of late nation/state-building processes as well. All this could not but have wielded a tremendous impact on the *Grenzbewohner*, i.e. the borderland population that was exposed to the cruel wheel of the region's history.

It is the historical context that cannot be neglected in any discussion on security-related themes pertaining to the region, the book in review included. Its author Radosław Buraczyński is a sociologist at the Institute for Slavonic Studies at the Technical University Dresden. His book was first written (and approved in 2013) as a dissertation at the University of Chemnitz and published in 2015 as a monograph by Springer VS.

The book addresses three key topics. First, the Europeanization of migration and border policies at EU level is discussed in a more general manner. Second – and closely related to the first notion – the author explores the facets of the so-called 'downloading' policy in the EU's multi-level governance system, thus disentangling the processes of Europeanization from the supranational EU level through the national (ch. 3) up to the regional level (ch. 4), where it is supposed to be implemented in first instance. Third, Buraczyński seeks to elaborate on the consequences of these policy changes for the self-positioning and behavioural patterns of the residents of the borderlands. The temporal and spatial context is framed by the Subcarpathian region in the very southeast of Poland (*Karpatenvorland*) that is studied from the transformation period of 1989 until present day.

Buraczyński resorts to a strand of literature which argues that "in the case of migration policy, Europeanization means *securitization*" (p. 15). [1] Thus, the book's main analytical framework is based on the so-called securitization theory. In its original form, developed in the early 1990s by the Copenhagen School as a

constructivist and critical response to traditional (positivist, state- and high-politics-centered) understandings of security, "securitization refers to the discursive process through which an issue is labelled a 'security' issue by an (elite) actor, a process which moves the issue out of the normal political sphere and into the security sphere, claiming a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means." [2]

The chosen theoretical framework is well-suited for the analysis of the case study on migration and border policies in the Polish Subcarpathian region. After the economic crisis of the 1970s/1980s had put an end to the permissive post-World War II labor immigration policies, the politicization and subsequent securitization of migrants inexorably picked up pace, and resulted in the conclusion of readmission agreements with various non-EU countries throughout the 1980s. This effectively converted the region into a "buffer-zone" (p. 58), which marked an important step in the securitization process. Buraczyński provides a thought-provoking account of how the border has continued to oscillate between its "characteristic dichotomy of openness-closeness" (p. 14) since 1989. He also shows how such a region-constitutive feature is linked to the process of Poland's European integration, which meant the transformation from a lax border regime, permeable for informal trade and exchange, into an external EU border, "aiming towards the mechanization of inspection processes and not permitting 'grey zones' anymore" (p. 172).

The reasons for Poland's rather uncritical adoption of the EU's solution models on migration policy are to be found in early learning and socialization processes, as well as in the high level of policy conditionality and the 'civilisatory ascent' over the course of Poland's role change into an eastward 'gatekeeper' of the European Union.

Nonetheless, the author did not deploy the explanatory power of the theoretical framework in full – which is why one has to acknowledge a certain unease with the empirical findings. Buraczyński's own definition of securitization reads as follows: Securitization is "[t]he discursive practice of utterance; a process during which a policy is subordinated under certain procedures, actors and rules, and put in a new discursive context of security and threat" (p.15). Its further conceptualization is partly lacking an elaborate analytical apparatus, including some theory-constitutive elements (some more than others), such as *audience, securitizing act, emergency measures, functional actors, exceptionality*. At the same time, those components that have been drawn into the analysis are not entirely located within the state of the art in this research field: The points of critique raised by the author himself – first and foremost, the narrow focus on language, the importance of context, and the variety of potential securitizing actors – have long been addressed by the field-impacting scholarship [3].

Buraczyński's equation of the Europeanisation of migration policy with securitization (p. 15) is not substantiated enough. Indeed, the process of securitization usually involves some sense of urgency and criticality, since the aim of a securitizing act is to move a policy issue from the area of "normal" to "exceptional" politics. Yet, some observers would agree that Europeanization is a bureaucratic and routinized process that *in itself* is far away from any securitization move [4]. Here, a change of the analytical perspective – away from a historical narrative spanning over long periods of time (ch. 3) to a more detail-focused method of process tracing (*who* 'speaks security' *how* to *whom* and *why*) – could have allowed Buraczyński to make the most of the theory he chose to employ.

The author's inconsistent recourse to the *acquis academique* of different theoretical schools [5] has informed an unnecessary analytical separation (p. 91) between the discursive construction (ch. 5) and discursive practices (ch. 4) in Buraczyński's discussion of the security-migration nexus in Poland's eastern borderlands. For example, whereas Buraczyński carefully denotes that the discourse about the Carpathian region had long been characterized by the imaginaries of easternness, poverty, and backwardness, he falls short of examining how certain elements in that multifaceted discourse had been used as a (re)source in policy securitization efforts. Thereby, the analysis unfolds at the descriptive level of relevant discourse(s) *about* securitization – failing to feature accounts of any agency and audience – instead of investigating the securitizing discourse as a recursive process of intentions and effects. On their own, however, chapters four (*Securitization in/of the Region*) and five (*Discursive Construction of the Polish East*) are truly insightful.

Similarly, Buraczyński elaborated well on the tension between the attempts of the central government to securitize the region, as manifested, for instance, in the framing of the Schengen Agreement as a means of protection (p. 143), and the attempts by the local authorities and regional media to present an alternative reading of the Agreement. However, a consequent application of the securitization concept should have led to the conclusion that the latter are *desecuritizing* attempts, that it is important to examine *who* the relevant securitizing actors are (journalists or state representatives), and who constitutes the audience that provides at least tacit approval of the (de)securitization move.

The concluding, explorative part of the study deals with the impact of securitization on the borderland residents. It is operationalized and embedded in the broader research strategy of Grounded Theory. The results show that the perception of securitization depends on the social background and the individually available resources. While those who in the 1990s relied on informal trade for their living heavily criticize the securing of the border, the members of the local elite refer to the "civilizing" effect of the installed border regime, and thus were inclined to internalize the securitizing discourse.

Building on Jef Huysmans' *political aesthetics of the everydayness*, Buraczyński concludes with a critical examination of the perspectives of desecuritization based on personal encounters between the populations on both sides of the border. His outlook is rather pessimistic, pointing to the fact that the lasting processes of securitization have fostered isolation along the Polish eastern borderland – just as they have led to the constraining of contacts between Poles and Ukrainians – and limiting them to rather negatively connotated contexts, such as *bazaars*.

Overall, Buraczyński's approach is highly promising in explanatory terms, and his theory-informed empirical analysis clearly shows this potential – albeit in a somewhat rudimentary form. A partially blurred conceptualization is responsible for a restricted use of the analytical framework. The monograph would have benefited immensely from including accounts of regional actors that actively pursue (de)securitization politics. Still, with some conceptual reservations, the book can be recommended as a multifaceted regional study.

[1] All quotations were translated from German to English by the author of this review.

[2] Jonna Nyman, *Securitization Theory*, in: Laura J. Shepherd (ed.), *Critical Approaches to Security: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*, New York/London: Routledge 2013, p. 51-62, here p. 52.

[3] See for example the volume by Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory. How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*, New York/London: Routledge 2011.

[4] See for example Monica Svantesson: *Threat Construction inside Bureaucracy: A Bourdieusian Study of the European Commission and the Framing of Irregular Immigration 1974-2009*, Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Politics 156.

[5] Buraczyński justiciously distinguishes between the Copenhagen School and the Paris School in particular (p. 33), yet he fails to discuss the far-reaching ontological and epistemological implications of the main point of disagreement between those two, i.e. the debate on how to combine the philosophical and the sociological strands in a single research design.



**Sposób cytowania:**

mgr Johann Zajackowski: Recenzja: Radosław Buraczyński: Die Herstellung von Sicherheit an der EU-Außengrenze. Migrations- und Grenzpolitik in der polnischen Region Karpatenvorland, 2015, w: <https://www.pol-int.org/pl/node/3710#r7493>.

<https://www.pol-int.org/pl/node/3710?j5Q6rewycZ5HtUDXTWpx7UZE=1&r=7493>