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‘A Europe without Walls, without Fences, without Borders’: A Desecuritisation of Migration Doomed to Fail

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Abstract

It has been commonly argued that amid the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in 2015, Greece ignored its Dublin Regulation obligations due to unprecedentedly high migration flows, structural weaknesses, fears and uncertainty. However, this narrative deprives the Greek government of agency. In contrast, this article puts forward an alternative analysis of Greece’s attitude. It argues that the Greek government’s policy choices in the realms of border controls, migration and asylum in 2015, prior to the ‘EU–Turkey deal’, manifested a well-calculated desecuritisation strategy with a twofold aim. In this respect, this article provides an analysis of why and how the newly elected SYRIZA-led coalition government embarked on a desecuritising move and assesses the success/effectiveness of this move and the desecuritisation strategy. It argues that although the government’s desecuritising move was successful, overall, its desecuritisation strategy failed to produce the anticipated results vis-à-vis the government’s twofold aim and intended outcomes.

Keywords

migration crisis, refugees, asylum policies, European Union, desecuritisation

Introduction

Between January 2015 and February 2016, that is prior to the implementation of the ‘EU–Turkey deal’, close to 1 million people crossed the Greek–Turkish borders in search of a better life. It is commonly argued that within this context the newly elected SYRIZA-led coalition government was caught off guard and began overtly ignoring its obligations under the Dublin Regulation (see Greenhill, 2016; Trauner, 2016). The asymmetrical burden of Greece’s responsibility under the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), in combination with unprecedentedly high numbers of refugees and migrants

triggered by wars and instability in neighbouring regions, and Greece's weakened structural capacity after 5 years of austerity, led the government to allow newcomers to move on unregistered to their preferred destination countries, mainly Germany and Sweden (Trauner, 2016: 312). Moreover, Greece's attitude was guided by significant migration-related fears and anxieties, and uncertainty regarding if and when adequate European Union (EU) assistance would be forthcoming with respect to the humanitarian emergency that was created on the islands (Greenhill, 2016).

Although this narrative provides a convincing account of the contextual factors that shaped Greece's inability to respond to the refugee influx, it tends to present the Greek government as an idle observer of unfolding developments. In other words, this narrative deprives the Greek government of agency. Instead, we argue that the SYRIZA-led coalition government made a number of bold policy choices in the realms of border controls, migration and asylum amid the 'migration crisis'.

This article puts forward an alternative analysis of Greece's policy choices amid the 'migration crisis'. Instead of conceptualising them as mere by-products of external factors, structural inabilities, fears, anxieties and uncertainty, this article argues that the Greek government's policy choices in the realms of border controls, migration and asylum, prior to the 'EU-Turkey deal', emanated from a well-calculated strategy with a twofold aim. On the one hand, it aimed to reinstate the rule of law in migration and asylum management in Greece, and liberalise the country's border control, migration and asylum policies. On the other hand, it aimed to 'Europeanise' the unfairness of the Dublin Regulation, pushing, in this way, for a fairer CEAS based on the principle of responsibility sharing, and, ultimately, for the liberalisation of border control, migration and asylum policies across Europe. Hence, we argue that behind the headlines of Greece's campaign for the end of austerity throughout the 2015 bailout negotiation, another campaign, less visible, equally persistent, and not always clearly demarcated from the former, was also taking place.

Our aim is also twofold: first, to understand why and how the newly elected Greek government attempted a U-turn from the previous government's border control, migration and asylum policies in 2015; and second, to assess the level of success of this policy shift vis-à-vis the government's objectives and intended outcomes. In this respect, we analyse the government's border control, migration and asylum policies, and the statements reported in the press made by government officials in 2015, by drawing on desecuritisation theory (see Buzan et al., 1998) and the consequentialist evaluation of security (see Floyd, 2007; 2010; 2011)

We argue that the government's policy shift comprised a desecuritisation of the country's border control, migration and asylum policies. We suggest that although the desecuritising move was successful, overall, desecuritisation failed to produce the anticipated results vis-à-vis the government's twofold aim and intended outcomes. The argument is structured as follows: the first section provides an overview of the restrictive border control, migration and asylum policies implemented under the previous New Democracy-led unity government. Next, the theoretical framework of the article is put forward, namely securitisation/desecuritisation theory and the consequentialist evaluation of security. Then we proceed with an outline of the border control, migration and asylum policy shift that was undertaken by the SYRIZA-led coalition government, and we identify the underlying aims and intended outcomes of the desecuritising move, and assess the level of its success. The remainder of the article explores the extent to which desecuritisation succeeded in advancing the interests of the state and its elites based on the latter's objectives and intended results, and analyses the factors that shaped the outcome of the strategy.

This article draws upon EU and migration studies (see Geddes, 2000; 2003), securitisation/desecuritisation literature (see Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2006) and work on agency, more specifically, constructivist institutionalism (see Hay, 2006; Hay and Wincott, 1998). The latter allows for a role for agency and a plausible alternative analysis for the interaction between agency and context, and institutional change. Constructivist institutionalism sees actors as strategic, pursuing specific complex, contingent and dynamic goals. Both their strategies and goals are shaped by the actors' perceptions of the context, which are incomplete and which may very often prove to have been ex post facto inaccurate. Similarly, their interests and motivations are informed by the actors' normative (moral, ethical and political) orientation towards the context. In this regard, the actors' perceptions about what is feasible, legitimate, possible and desirable are equally shaped by the institutional context in which they find themselves and by existing policy paradigms and world views (Hay, 2006). According to Blyth (2002), it is particularly in times of crisis institutional changes take place, through short bouts of intense ideational contestations in which actors' perceptions of their own goals, strategies, interests and motivations become problematised. We argue that a similar brief but intense ideational struggle that took place amid the 'migration crisis' instigated a shift in border control, migration and asylum policies in Greece and across Europe.

The New Democracy–Led Unity Government's Border Control, Migration and Asylum Policies: 2012–2014

Increased flows of asylum seekers from Northern Africa that followed the Arab Spring in 2011 were treated with unease by the EU, and triggered the tightening of border control, migration and asylum policies at the outposts of the Union, including Greece (Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi, 2013). At the same time, the increasing popularity of the extreme-right party Golden Dawn in opinion polls prior to the 2012 double legislative elections, as well as the electoral success of the party in both May and June elections, set the issue of 'illegal migration' on top of the domestic political agenda. In fear of losing more votes to its far-right opponent and pushed by heightened migration-related anxieties across the EU, the New Democracy–led unity government that was formed in June 2012 introduced a number of repressive measures in order to curb 'illegal migration' flows and combat 'illegal stay' of third-country nationals in Greece (see Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2016; Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi, 2013).

In August 2012, Operations *Aspida* (Shield) and *Xenios Zeus* were introduced at the Greek–Turkish land border and in mainland Greece, respectively, in a combined attempt to deal with both 'illegal entry and stay' of third-country nationals. This criminalisation of irregular entry and stay of third-country nationals was accompanied by an increase in deportations and strong support of voluntary return programmes (Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi, 2013: 613). In October 2012, the detention period of all migrants and asylum seekers – including migrant women, unaccompanied minors and persons with health problems – was extended by up to 12 months, that is, up to 18 months in total. This measure was clearly a deterrent for asylum applications, since asylum seekers were informed upon lodging an application that they would be detained longer and were thus discouraged from doing so (Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi, 2013: 611). Finally, in December 2012, the construction of a 12.5-km-long barbed wire fence at the Greek–Turkish land border was completed. These repressive measures had a severe impact on the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Karyotis and Skleparis, 2013; Skleparis,

2016). Moreover, they contributed to the further exacerbation of the longstanding Greek asylum system crisis, which was characterised by one of the lowest asylum recognition rates in the EU and structural weaknesses in registering and processing asylum claims (Cabot, 2014).

The severity of the Greek asylum system crisis was acknowledged by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in the *MSS v Belgium and Greece* (2011).¹ The Court decided the suspension of all transfers of asylum seekers from other member states to Greece on the grounds of dysfunctions in the national asylum system, inhuman and degrading detention conditions in the country and deprivation of asylum seekers' right to an effective remedy. It should be noted, however, that the Greek asylum system was in crisis long before the introduction of repressive asylum policies by the unity government in 2012 (Cabot, 2014). Despite international criticisms and calls for improvement of the national asylum system (see CPT, 2012), the unity government chose to put emphasis on strengthening border controls, surveillance and patrols at the Greek–Turkish border and cracking down on 'illegal stay' of third-country nationals in urban centres.

The SYRIZA-led coalition government that emerged from the January 2015 elections performed a bold 180-degree turn from the restrictive border control, migration and asylum policies of the previous government. During its election campaign, SYRIZA pledged to expedite the asylum application process, stop the use of systematic and indiscriminate detention, close down detention centres and replace them with open hospitality centres, stop push-backs at the borders, encourage family reunification, remove EU restrictions on the travel of migrants and the fence from the Greek–Turkish land border, grant citizenship to second-generation migrants, and strengthen the protection of human rights in general (Katsiaficas, 2015). As a showcase of determination, a respected human rights lawyer and a distinguished professor of criminology were appointed as Alternate Minister for Migration Policy and Alternate Minister for Public Order and Civil Protection, respectively.

The next section provides an overview of the theoretical framework, which we use to interpret the coalition government's turn to softer policies, and assess their effectiveness vis-à-vis their underlying aims and intended outcomes.

Securitisation/Desecuritisation

The policies implemented under the New Democracy– and SYRIZA-led governments can be understood within the securitisation/desecuritisation theoretical framework. A number of studies have focused on the securitisation of migration in Greece and its effects (see Karyotis, 2012; Karyotis and Skleparis, 2013; Lazaridis and Skleparis, 2016; Skleparis, 2016). Securitisation occurs when an actor, most often a political leader, uses the rhetoric of existential threat to legitimise the deployment of emergency policies with the consent of a specific audience, usually the public opinion, pushing in this way an issue of 'normal politics' into the security realm (Williams, 1998: 435). In other words, an issue becomes a security threat through securitisation, not necessarily due to its objective importance as a security threat, but because it is presented as such (Waever, 2004: 13). To put it in concrete terms, securitisation occurs when migrants are successfully presented by political elites in their public speeches as outsiders to an already-existing national identity, who can potentially threaten its existence in various ways, such as through cultural and demographic erosion, criminality, economic instability and so on (Buzan et al., 1998).

Securitisation constitutes a negative or a failure to manage issues within the realm of 'normal politics' (Buzan et al., 1998: 29). Henceforth, desecuritisation, a desirable

antidote to the process of securitisation, has been put forward, which causes the opposite effect by moving issues out of the threat-defence sequence back to the realm of ‘normal politics’, where they can be managed according to the rules of democratic government (Buzan et al., 1998). Desecuritisation constitutes the move of an issue from the securitised to the politicised (i.e. the issue continues to be part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations), rather than to the non-politicised (i.e. the issue does not need to be dealt with by the state as it is no more in the public agenda) (Hansen, 2012: 531). Moreover, similar to securitisation, the desecuritisation of an issue is always deliberate and ‘explicitly political’ (Williams, 2003: 520), devised on the grounds of cost/benefit calculations regarding desired political outcomes vis-à-vis potential reactions of other actors at play (Waever, 1995: 75). By extension, this entails that a mixture of interests, (dis)incentives and contextual factors determines whether and how an actor will try to desecuritize an issue, and keep it in or move it to the realm of ‘normal politics’ (Hansen, 2012: 541–544).

The desecuritisation of an issue does not happen through statements such as ‘I hereby declare this issue to no longer be a threat’, as this would be drawing upon the language and logic of security, and thus, it would be against the rationale of desecuritisation (Hansen, 2012: 530). There is not, strictly speaking, ‘a’ desecuriting speech act, although desecuritisation takes place through speech acts (Hansen, 2012). Desecuritisation is performative, which means that ‘it must instantiate the non-threatening identity of the Other’ (Hansen, 2012: 533). Focusing on how migration could be desecuritized in the EU, Huysmans (1995) has put forward three different strategies in which desecuritisation processes could work out: the ‘objectivist strategy’, which aims to show that migrants are falsely perceived as a threat to an already-existing national identity; the ‘constructivist strategy’, which aims to increase the awareness of the audience regarding the processes through which migration is constructed as a security threat in order to undermine the effectiveness of securitising moves; and the ‘deconstructivist strategy’, which aims to give voice to the disempowered migrants in order to undermine the exclusionary ‘us/them’ dichotomy. Moreover, based on the status of the ‘friend–enemy distinction’ and the possibility of a public sphere, Hansen (2012) has identified four forms of desecuritisation: ‘change through stabilisation’, which happens when an issue is framed in terms other than security, but where the larger conflict is still imminent; ‘replacement’, which takes place when an issue is removed from the realm of securitisation and is substituted by another issue; ‘rearticulation’, which occurs when an issue is moved to the realm of ‘normal politics’ due to a resolution of the threats and risks that underpinned the initial securitisation; and ‘silencing’, which happens when an issue is non-politicised and marginalises potentially insecure subjects.

Securitisation/desecuritisation offers the tools to understand when and how an actor utilises/abandons a security discourse that aims to legitimise the implementation of extraordinary policies that regulate a specific issue. Nevertheless, it does not provide us with the necessary tools to assess the effectiveness of a shift from softer to tighter policies and vice versa vis-à-vis its intended outcomes. Securitisation/desecuritisation enables the researcher to evaluate the level of success of a specific securitising/desecuriting move (i.e. the extent to which an audience agrees with/rejects the attempt of an actor to securitize/desecuritize an issue), but not its final outcome, that is, the level of success of a particular policy shift vis-à-vis the aims of the actor that instigated it. In order to assess the level of effectiveness of the desecuritisation of border control, migration and asylum policies in Greece in 2015, we draw on an evaluative strategy of the consequences of

securitisation/desecuritisation, or else, a consequentialist evaluation of security (Floyd, 2007, 2010, 2011. See also Roe, 2012).

According to Floyd (2007: 328), neither security/securitisation nor ‘desecurity’/desecuritisation is either always positive/effective or negative/ineffective, but rather issue dependent. Indeed, according to securitisation/desecuritisation framework, all securitisation processes are understood as a priori negative/ineffective, while all desecuritisation processes are considered a priori positive/effective. Floyd, however, refutes this assumption and argues instead that their assessment as positive/effective or negative/ineffective depends on the principle of issue dependency. She notes that the evaluation of positive/negative or effective/ineffective does not depend on the analyst’s personal preferences, but rather must derive from ‘a rigorous analytical and practical evaluation of what kind of security best addresses insecurity’, highlighting the relational nature of security, whereby one actor’s security is another actor’s insecurity (Floyd, 2007: 340, 343).

Floyd (2007) developed her consequentialist evaluation of security by studying the Bush administration’s environmental policies. Her main argument is that despite the successful desecuritisation of the environment during the Bush administration, the results of the policy shift were not necessarily positive. Her study is an attempt to overcome the normative dilemma of speaking/writing security, that is the need for the researcher to be critical of his/her own writing of security, which can potentially transform the theorisation of security and securitisation into actual negative security measures. However, Floyd’s aim contradicts her main argument which seems to imply that in some issues, such as the environment, the logic of creating enemies and allowing exceptional measures against them (i.e. securitisation) is a more effective/positive strategy than desecuritisation (Trombetta, 2010: 139). Indeed, without the deconstruction of the structural power relations which inform security policy, Floyd’s consequentialist evaluation of security can lead to assumptions that may be in stark contrast to the researcher’s intentions.

In what follows, we present the SYRIZA-led coalition government’s border control, migration and asylum policies, and draw on desecuritisation theory and the consequentialist evaluation of security to better understand why and how the Greek government embarked on a policy U-turn in 2015 and to assess the level of success of this policy shift vis-à-vis the government’s objectives. More specifically, we identify the underlying aims and intended outcomes of the government’s desecuritisising move and assess the level of its success. We then explore the extent to which desecuritisation succeeded in advancing the interests of the state and its elites based on the latter’s objectives and intended results.

The SYRIZA-Led Coalition Government’s Border Control, Migration and Asylum Policies: 2015 to February 2016

In 2015, the newly elected SYRIZA-led coalition government performed a coordinated bold U-turn from the restrictive border control, migration and asylum policies of the previous government, despite failing to adhere to some of its pledges (e.g. removal of the fence).

Greece’s detention and deportation policy changed dramatically under the new government (Skleparis, 2017). In March 2015, an official document, allegedly a ministerial circular, was leaked, which specified that asylum seekers who entered the country irregularly would not be detained at the borders, and instead they would be provided with a document, which instructed them to leave the country in 30 days. The government reactivated Law 3709/11, according to which all refugees would be hosted in open hospitality

centres, while migrants and rejected asylum seekers would be given 30 days, without being detained, to voluntarily return to their home countries. In cases where deportation was not possible after the expiry of the deadline (that is the vast majority of cases), migrants and rejected asylum seekers would be given a 6-month temporary residence permit. The government also proclaimed the closure of detention centres – beginning with the infamous *Amygdaleza* – and their gradual conversion into open hospitality centres with improved living conditions. Thousands of asylum seekers, mainly vulnerable groups who had been detained longer than 6 months, were gradually released and granted a 6-month residence permit, with no right to work, however (Skleparis and Armakolas, 2016). In August 2015, the first open hospitality centre in *Elaionas*, Athens, welcomed its first guests.

The newly elected government also changed internal and external border control policies, which were largely resulting in human rights violations (see Skleparis, 2016). In February 2015, the then Alternate Minister for Migration Policy stated that Operation *Xenios Zeus* belonged to the past (To Vima, 2015). In the same manner, Operation *Aspida* was also discontinued, allegedly, due to lack of funds and the significantly reduced migration flows at the Greek–Turkish land border (Bolani et al., 2016: 84). Similarly, the fence in the same area, which suffered major damage from floods during the winter of 2014–2015, was left unrepaired (Bolani et al., 2016). In early July 2015, anti-smuggling penalties in cases of transportation of third-country nationals in need of international protection or within the context of a sea rescue were abolished. This decriminalised and facilitated the transportation of undocumented third-country nationals inside Greece. Finally, Law 4332/2015, which was ratified by the parliament on 9 July 2015, amended the Citizenship Code (Law 4521/2014), and enabled second-generation migrants born and raised in Greece to access citizenship.

The Underlying Aims and Intended Outcomes of a Successful Desecuritising Move

Within this context, we argue that the first overarching aim of the SYRIZA-led coalition government was to reinstate the rule of law in migration and asylum management, and liberalise the country's border control, migration and asylum policies. The newly elected government made sure to leave its progressive mark quite early, as the then Alternate Minister for Migration Policy stated in an interview regarding the relaxation of the Citizenship Law: '[The citizenship law] constitutes our obligation towards legal immigrants [...] It is our obligation to grant citizenship to all those who want to become Greek citizens, and want to share their present and future with us' (Proto Thema, 2015a). The same Minister also argued with respect to increasing migration flows that '[t]here are no immigrants anymore; whoever is entering our country is a refugee' (News.gr, 2015). She clarified that detention must only be used as 'an exceptional measure' and prioritised the immediate release of unaccompanied minors, the abolition of the 18-month detention period and the termination of asylum seekers' detention (Aljazeera, 2015). Similarly, the former Alternate Minister for Public Order and Civil Protection stated to the journalists while exiting the *Amygdaleza* detention centre following his visit in the aftermath of the suicide of a Pakistani detainee:

I came to express the sadness and grief of the ministry and the government, but now I express my shame, not as a minister, but as a human being [...] This is not the image of a European

country and of a country that respects human beings [...] The worst racist would break down [...] We will end with detention centres. These people are not criminals, neither prisoners; they have entered the country illegally (Newsbomb, 2015a).

The government also aimed to liberalise the country's border control policy, which was synonymous with push-backs and violations of the principle of non-refoulement (Skleparis, 2016). Referring to the ongoing flows, the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy attempted to highlight the paradox of controlling sea borders and at the same time admitting all those who seek refuge: 'we cannot control the flow through the sea; we would have to sink boats. We need legal ways [of migration] otherwise the smugglers manage the flow' (Ta Nea, 2015a); 'When a refugee boat is spotted in the middle of the sea, it cannot be deterred, as it is against international laws. Push-backs are illegal' (Avgi, 2016). Referring to the new approach to external border controls, the Alternate Foreign Minister for European Affairs stated:

We are acting in accordance with the rules of international law, in accordance with the EU treaties, and in line with the fundamental principles of the democracies and peoples of Europe. In accordance with these principles, we are not repelling people who are at sea; that is, we do not leave them to sink and drown. We are saving human lives (Ministry of Affairs, 2015).

Furthermore, we argue that the second overarching aim of the government was to 'Europeanise' the unfairness of the Dublin Regulation, pushing, in this way, for a fairer CEAS based on the principle of responsibility sharing. Arguing that the CEAS, and more specifically the Dublin Regulation, produces highly inequitable burden-sharing responsibilities between frontline and non-frontline EU member states does not constitute a novelty (see Thielemann and Armstrong, 2013; Uçarer, 2006). Indeed, 'the implementation of the existing EU asylum rules may overburden southern member states while the perpetuated ignorance of these rules risks overburdening northern member states' (Trauner, 2016: 322). Within this context, SYRIZA pledged in its pre-election campaign to pursue the revision of the Dublin Regulation in order to secure a more equal distribution of asylum seekers and refugees across the EU, despite the fact that Greece already had a special, albeit temporary, arrangement on not receiving asylum seeker returnees from other member states since 2011. This intention was clearly reflected in the following statement of the Alternate Foreign Minister for European Affairs:

[Addressing the Schengen countries Ambassadors] You are eyewitnesses to what is happening on the European borders. We [the Greek government] are shouldering the burden of receiving people from the war regions, from regions in civil conflict or regions of poverty and despair (Ministry of Affairs, 2015).

To put it in the words of the Greek PM: '[t]he principle of solidarity should not be treated à la carte. The first-reception member states should not be treated as warehouses of souls' (Prime Minister, 2015); '[t]he problem of refugee and migration flows is a European problem, which demands a European solution' (Ta Nea, 2015b). The ultimate intended outcome of this 'Europeanisation' strategy was the gradual liberalisation of border control, migration and asylum policies across Europe, as manifested in the public statements of the Greek PM: 'We don't believe that the future of Europe and our world can be constructed with increasingly higher walls of exclusion or with toddlers dying at

our front door' (Proto Thema, 2015b); '[o]ur vision is to have a Europe without walls, without fences, without borders' (Newsbomb.gr, 2015b).

The public speeches of government officials and the implemented policies in 2015 demonstrated elements of all three desecuritisation strategies proposed by Huysmans. The public statement of the former Alternate Minister for Migration Policy that '[t]here are no immigrants anymore; whoever is entering our country is a refugee' constituted a clear attempt to pursue the 'objectivist' desecuritisation strategy.² The public statement of the former Alternate Minister for Public Order and Civil Protection that '[w]e will end with detention centres. These people are not criminals, neither prisoners; they have entered the country illegally', as well as the intention to substitute all detention centres with open hospitality facilities, were explicit attempts to pursue the 'constructivist' desecuritisation strategy. Both the statement and the policy shift aimed to break the link between criminality and migration and reverse the securitisation process in order to undermine the effectiveness of potential future securitising moves. The statement of the former Alternate Minister for Migration Policy that '[i]t is our obligation to grant citizenship to all those who want to become Greek citizens, and want to share their present and future with us' was an attempt to pursue the 'deconstructivist' desecuritisation strategy. The statement, as well as the policy shift manifested an attempt to include and empower all those who were previously excluded, and undermine the divisive and polarising 'us/them' dichotomy. In all, following Hansen's categorisation, the government's desecuritising move constituted a 'change through stabilisation' strategy, which attempted to instantiate a non-threatening identity of the 'Other' and frame the issue of migration in terms other than security, despite the fact that the broader challenge (i.e. rapidly increasing migration flows and related unease) was still present.

Indeed, this desecuritising move was successful. Based on the findings of a public opinion poll conducted in January 2016 in Greece, the SYRIZA-led coalition government managed to convince the majority that migration did not constitute primarily a security issue, as 67% expressed positive feelings towards refugees that had entered the country during the past year (Dianeosis, 2016: 50). In general, the terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' were perceived positively (66% and 59%) (Dianeosis, 2016: 60, 61). Furthermore, contrary to public fears in the rest of the EU, Greeks were convinced that migrants and refugees did not constitute a terrorist threat, as a Jihadist terrorist attack in the country within the next year was considered unlikely (57%) (Dianeosis, 2016: 94). The government also managed to convince the public that the border control policy shift was justified, as 66% disagreed with the closure of borders to refugees (Dianeosis, 2016: 43), while a vast majority (92%) echoed the government's narrative that the EU did not support Greece during the refugee influx (Dianeosis, 2016: 32). The resonance of the 'change through stabilisation' desecuritising move was such that 58% stated that they had supported either materially or through voluntary work refugees during the past year (Dianeosis, 2016: 56).

Despite the success of the desecuritising move, however, the strategy's underlying aims and intended outcomes were not fully materialised. The following section assesses the level of success of the desecuritisation based on a comparison between the actual outcomes and consequences of this strategy, and its underlying aims and intended outcomes.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the Desecuritisation Strategy

As we argued earlier, the first overarching aim of the SYRIZA-led coalition government was to reinstate the rule of law in migration and asylum management, and liberalise the

country's border control, migration and asylum policies. Yet, the government's decision to put an end to indiscriminate and prolonged detention of migrants and asylum seekers did not produce the anticipated results. Although the number of detainees was significantly reduced, living conditions in detention facilities didn't record any significant improvement (CPT, 2016: 65). Moreover, following the release of vulnerable detainees, a large number of asylum seekers ended up living on the streets in downtown Athens in even worse conditions than before, as no alternative open hospitality facility was in place to house them (Skleparis and Armakolas, 2016). It was several months later when the first open hospitality centre in *Elaionas*, Athens, welcomed its first guests, nevertheless, priority was given to newcomers rather than those who had been released from detention earlier that year.

Furthermore, some vulnerable individuals were still exposed to the policy of detention. Unaccompanied minors were systematically detained upon arrival in Greece, often under poor conditions amounting to inhuman or degrading treatment, during authorities' search for available space in children's shelters (Human Rights Watch, 2015b). This policy aimed to protect unaccompanied minors from all sorts of exploitation and abuse amid the humanitarian emergency. Yet, the unintended consequence was that many of them started lying about their age to avoid detention and continue their journey, increasing, in this way, the risk of falling victims to exploitation. Additionally, obstacles to accessing international protection persisted for both detained and non-detained individuals (Amnesty International, 2016). However, no government would have been able to solve these longstanding structural problems in Greek asylum and detention systems in such a short period of time and within the context of unprecedentedly high flows.

Despite the government's decision to put an end to Operations *Xenios Zeus* and *Aspida*, human rights violations in immigration enforcement did not disappear. Although ending Operation *Xenios Zeus* was clearly a step to the right direction in tackling longstanding human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2015a), allegations of excessive use of force by the authorities, torture and other ill-treatment of refugees and migrants persisted (Amnesty International, 2016: 169). Additionally, the end of Operation *Aspida* did not put an end to push-backs and collective expulsions, which continued at the Greek–Turkish borders (Amnesty International, 2016: 168). An unintended consequence of the border control policy shift was the emergence of vigilante armed masked men, who disabled refugee boats in the Aegean Sea and pushed them back to Turkish territorial waters (Human Rights Watch, 2015c).

The second overarching aim of the government according to our analysis – the 'Europeanisation' of the unfairness of the Dublin Regulation and the push for a fairer CEAS and, ultimately, liberal border control, migration and asylum policies across Europe – did not materialise either. The government's strategy backfired and created negative consequences far beyond its intended outcomes, as it was devised on the grounds of wrong cost/benefit calculations regarding desired political outcomes vis-à-vis potential reactions of other actors at play. Indeed, the government enjoyed minimum support by human rights watchdogs, which should have been its natural allies in its 'Europeanisation' campaign (see Human Rights Watch, 2015d).

Moreover, the government did not manage to convince its EU counterparts regarding the motives of its strategy, which resulted in limited gains. Its main, and perhaps only gain based on its aims was the introduction in September 2015 of an EU emergency refugee relocation system that would relocate 120,000 refugees from Italy and Greece over the course of 2 years. The 'Europeanisation' campaign also succeeded in securing

considerable EU financial assistance in dealing with the repercussions of the humanitarian crisis, which was not, however, among the aims of the government according to the Alternate Minister for Migration Policy (see European Parliament Audiovisual Services for Media, 2016).

The threat to instrumentalise the liberalisation of border control, migration, and asylum policies in order to gain leverage in the ongoing bailout negotiation jumbled the desecuritisation strategy, failed to win allies in the EU, led to a loss of the government's credibility and called into question Greece's loyalty to Europe. SYRIZA won the January 2015 election on the promise to scrap the previous bailout deal with the Troika, renegotiate the terms of the agreement and get tough with the country's creditors (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016: 433). Hence, the government embarked on a tough 5-month negotiation with its creditors, which culminated in July 2015. The leverage that the Greek side thought it had was based on 'the fear of a spillover effect from a possible disorderly exit of Greece from the Eurozone which could precipitate the disintegration of the Monetary Union' (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016: 437). However, it soon became clear that this leverage was not producing the desired results during the negotiation, as the EU's control over Greece's liquidity gave the creditors the necessary power to force concessions to the Greek side (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016).

Thus, government officials not directly involved in the bailout negotiation introduced a new tactic, which emphasised the geopolitical threats to the EU should a Grexit fell flat (Tsebelis, 2016: 30). Among these officials was the Greek Defence Minister who threatened to instrumentalise the liberalisation of Greece's border control, migration and asylum policies in order to gain leverage in the bailout negotiation otherwise 'if we [the government] do not get what we want from negotiations, we'll do a "Kougi"' (Kathimerini, 2015).³ The Defence Minister clarified what he meant in another public statement:

If they [the creditors] deal a blow to Greece, then they should know the migrants will get papers to go to Berlin. If Europe leaves us in the crisis, we will flood it with migrants, and it will be even worse for Berlin if in that wave of millions of economic migrants there will be some jihadists of the Islamic State too (The Telegraph, 2015).

The threat to instrumentalise desecuritisation in order to achieve gains in the bailout negotiation compromised the government's pursuit of a fairer CEAS and triggered processes which were far beyond its aims and intended outcomes. On 2 February 2016, the Commission adopted the Schengen evaluation report on Greece and communicated to the Council recommendations to address specific deficiencies in the external border management. The report had found that Greece was 'seriously neglecting its obligations under the Schengen rules' and that there were 'serious deficiencies in the carrying out of external border control' (European Commission, 2015). In case 'serious deficiencies' persisted 3 months after the adoption of the recommendation, the Commission had the right to reintroduce controls at Greece's border as a means of last resort. The threat to instrumentalise desecuritisation amid unprecedentedly high flows in order to gain leverage in the bailout negotiation not only compromised the pursuit of a fairer CEAS, but it also pushed the issues of reintroduction of internal border controls and 'Schengen Grexit' on top of the EU agenda.

In addition, EU external border controls were further securitised and militarised as the understanding of security that the government's desecuritisation strategy encapsulated ended up increasing other member states' insecurity. In parallel to the adoption of the

Schengen evaluation report on Greece, the Commission tabled earlier than expected a proposal to establish a European Border and Coast Guard, which should replace and considerably strengthen Frontex. The main role of the new agency would be ‘to help provide integrated border management at the external borders [...] ensure the effective management of migration flows and provide a high level of security for the EU’ (European Council, 2016). Furthermore, on 11 February 2016, NATO Defence Ministers decided to deploy ships to the Aegean Sea to assist with tackling irregular border crossings.

Finally, the government, not only failed in pushing for the liberalisation of border control, migration and asylum policies across Europe, but its jumbled desecuritisation strategy also triggered the hardening of policies in a number of European states. Amid rapidly increasing asylum applications, many mainland member states announced the limitation of the duration of the protection status and/or residence permits (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden), the curtailment of family reunification provisions (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden), cuts in social benefits for refugees and/or asylum seekers (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Latvia), the reinstatement of internal border controls (e.g. Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden), and the construction of fences (e.g. Austria, Hungary, Slovenia). The aim of these policies – which in some cases were driven by a logic of exception (e.g. Hungary) and in others by a sense of unease (e.g. Germany) (see Huysmans and Buonfino, 2008) – was to lower the attractiveness of mainland member states as destination countries.

The government’s desecuritisation strategy was largely ineffective/negative, as it failed to fulfil its underlying aims and intended outcomes. On the one hand, it did not manage to reinstate the rule of law in migration and asylum management. According to human rights watchdogs, migrants who were released from detention ended up living in worse conditions than before, while for those who remained in detention no significant improvement in their living conditions was recorded. The policy of detention persisted not only as a means of last resort, and so did collective expulsions, push-backs and ill-treatment.

On the other hand, the government was also unsuccessful in ‘Europeanising’ the unfairness of the Dublin Regulation, and pushing for a fairer CEAS and, ultimately, liberal border control, migration and asylum policies across Europe. Amid unprecedentedly high flows, the threat to instrumentalise desecuritisation in order to achieve gains in the bailout negotiation compromised the government’s strategy and forced it to backfire, as the understanding of security that it encapsulated ended up increasing other member states’ insecurity. The government’s jumbled strategy put in motion processes that led to the further securitisation of border control, migration and asylum policies across the EU. The reintroduction of internal border controls in the Schengen area, the ‘Schengen Grexit’ scenario, the Commission’s proposal to establish a European Border and Coast Guard sooner than expected, the unforeseen involvement of NATO in external border controls, and the hardening of migration and asylum policies in a number of mainland member states were key elements of these processes.

Further Remarks

Our aim was, first, to provide an understanding of the reasons why and ways in which the newly elected Greek government attempted a U-turn from the previous government’s border control, migration and asylum policies in 2015; and, second, to put forward an assessment of the level of success of this policy shift vis-à-vis the government’s

objectives and intended outcomes. We argued that Greece's decision to ignore its Dublin Regulation obligations amid the 'migration crisis' was not merely guided by external factors, structural deficiencies and uncertainty. We suggested that it emanated from a well-calculated and coordinated desecuritisation strategy with a twofold aim: the reinstatement of the rule of law in migration and asylum management in Greece, and the liberalisation of the country's border control, migration and asylum policies, on the one hand; and the 'Europeanisation' of the unfairness of the Dublin Regulation, as a means of pushing for a fairer CEAS, and, ultimately, for the liberalisation of border control, migration and asylum policies across the EU, on the other. We maintained that despite the fact that the government's desecuritising move was successful, overall, desecuritisation did not produce the anticipated results vis-à-vis the government's proclaimed aims and intended outcomes.

The coalition government performed a bold 180-degree turn from the repressive border control, migration and asylum policies of the previous government within an extremely adverse context. Between January 2015 and February 2016 – that is before the 'EU–Turkey deal', when the government performed its policy U-turn – close to 950,000 people crossed the Greek–Turkish sea border, which resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis on the Greek islands. Despite the fact that eventually less than 1% of them requested asylum in Greece at that point, the government did not manage to fulfil its much anticipated promises to fix the longstanding structural problems in the asylum system, end human rights violations in immigration enforcement, improve living conditions of asylum seekers in the country and substitute detention centres with open hospitality facilities. Indeed, it would be completely unrealistic to expect that any government would have been able to achieve these goals in such a short time and within such an unfavourable context. However, it should also be noted that some of the implemented policies were designed to fail regardless of the flows (Skleparis, 2017). For instance, the decision of the government to release on the streets thousands of detained asylum seekers without any provisions and without having in place alternative facilities (i.e. open hospitality centres) to support them was a move with high symbolic, but also negative value.

Furthermore, the government perhaps overestimated its capacity to successfully complete its policy U-turn, and underestimated the clear signs of a significant increase in migration flows. As numbers started to escalate during the summer and autumn months, the government's attempt to introduce an effective state-led emergency humanitarian, rather than security, response was hindered by 5 years of austerity measures, a political focus on the bailout negotiation and the relationship with the EU, and a lack of clarity (and in some cases conflict) in respective responsibilities between the newly created Ministry for Migration and the Ministry for Public Order and Civil Protection (Crawley et al., 2016: 14).

The threat to instrumentalise desecuritisation in order to gain leverage in the bailout negotiation was another factor that undermined the effectiveness of the government's strategy. The threat, which was put forward by a cabinet member not directly involved in either the negotiation or the policy U-turn, shattered the 'non-threatening identity of the Other' that had been effortfully constructed by other government officials, which was an essential prerequisite for a successful/effective desecuritisation. The threat to 'flood' Europe with 'a wave of millions of economic migrants', and among them 'some Jihadists of the Islamic State', if Greece did not get what it wanted from the negotiation, compromised the government's 'change through stabilisation' desecuritisation strategy, which instantiated people on the move as refugees in need of a humanitarian, rather

than a security, policy response. This very threat unveiled an understanding of security among Greek government officials, which eventually became other EU governments' insecurity.

The desecuritisation strategy failed not only because the 'non-threatening identity of the Other' was shattered, but also because it ignored the structural power relations that inform EU security policy. The securitisation of migration in the EU and its member states has largely developed on the basis of internal security concerns (Huysmans, 2000). The central element of these concerns is the assumption that the abolition of internal border controls has facilitated the free flow of goods, capital, services and people, as well as ille-gal and criminal activities by terrorists, international criminal organisations, asylum seek-ers and immigrants (Huysmans, 2000). The Schengen agreement and the birth of 'Schengenland' (Kostakopoulou, 1998; Walters, 2002) gave rise to a security field that brought together crime, drugs, asylum seekers, human smugglers, terrorists, and so on, and blurred the distinction between 'external' and 'internal', which was the organising princi-ple of modern state security practices (Bigo, 2001). The gradual abolition of internal bor-ders was compensated and counterbalanced with a series of 'flanking measures' that aimed to harmonise and reinforce EU external border controls in order to safeguard who/what can legitimately enter the space of free movement (Huysmans, 2000; Kostakopoulou, 1998; Walters, 2002). In this regard, the Schengen border consists of two 'types' of border that operate as one: a 'traditional', hardened, 'external' one, which comprises watchtow-ers, fences and detection devices, and a more diffuse, networked 'internal' one, which is no longer territorially fixed and delimited (Walters, 2002: 573). What is more, both 'types' structurally produce human rights violations in border, migration and asylum management and control (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008; Skleparis, 2016).

Within this context, it is extremely hard to imagine how any desecuritisation strategy that focuses on the liberalisation of external border controls can succeed, even if the 'non-threatening identity of the Other' is successfully constructed, as the notion of security that it encapsulates will necessarily threaten the perception of security of other EU member states. In this respect, out of all factors, it was perhaps the Greek Prime Minister's vision of 'a Europe without walls, without fences, without borders' that doomed the govern-ment's desecuritisation strategy to fail.

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Notes

1. European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) (GC), *MSS v Belgium and Greece*, Appl. No. 30696/09, 21 Jan. 2011.
2. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data, approximately 90% of arrivals in Greece come from the world's top 10 refugee-producing countries. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>.
3. 'Kougi' refers to a heroic episode of the Greek resistance against the Ottoman rule more than two centu-ries ago, whereby a group of Souliotes chose to blow themselves up at Kougi Fortress rather than being captured by their enemies.

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