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Just/unjust securitisation and social mobilisation

Introduction

Securitisation is defined as an intersubjective process of construing new categories or subcategories of security by identifying existential threats, the alleviation of which requires extraordinary measures and social acceptance.¹ Developed by The Copenhagen School in the 1990s, it responded to the collapse of the bipolar world, which had coincided with the expansion of security category. Terrorism, organized crime, hunger, and environmental degradation were named the new global threats, while security studies found a space for the perspective claiming that collective security was a sum of subjectively construed human securities, which has not only a military or political dimension, but also an economic, social, and ecological one. The combination of the Cold War optimism and the lack of a permanent military threat thus created a space for taking into consideration non-military problems that posed a threat to security.²

¹ B. Buzan, "Peace, Power, and Security: Contending Concepts in the Study of International Relations", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 21, issue 2, 1984, p. 111, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338402100203>.

² P. Polko, "Securitisation of communication in public space during Covid 19 pandemic", *Journal of Security and Sustainability Issues*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2020, p. 15, [http://doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2020.10.2\(2\)](http://doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2020.10.2(2)).

That is how security has become one of the keywords of modern communication, sometimes used instrumentally as value,³ mostly to justify various kinds of reforms, restrictions, or expenditures for security reasons.⁴ Thus, security should be regarded as a meta-operator with great impact, and as such, it offers great power – it can help solve problems which are theoretically far removed from the issue of security (as in the case of securitisation of the AIDS threat and the need to combat the spread of HIV in Africa),⁵ as well as exhibit its destructive power (securitisation of migration issues).⁶ Securitisation theorists argue that a subject that has been successfully securitised will receive disproportionate attention and resources in comparison with subjects that have not been securitised, even when the actually cause more harm. If a subject is successfully securitised, it is possible to legitimise extraordinary means to solve a perceived problem. This could include declaring a state of emergency or martial law, mobilizing the military, or attacking another country. However, it might undermine democratic processes and diminish necessary scrutiny which should be focused on the political elites.⁷

Securitisation theory (ST) is based on three key elements – existential threat, extraordinary measures needed to combat the threat, and the acceptance of the “audience” (mostly the elites or society). In order for threats to be considered security issues, they must meet a certain set of criteria “which distinguish them from the normal course of purely political issues.”⁸ The existential threat needs to be treated as the subject of exceptional policies implemented outside the standard democratic processes.⁹

³ K. Booth, Critical explorations, [in:] *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, ed. eadem, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, p. 22; M. Chehabeddine, M. Tvaronavičienė, “Securing regional development”, *Insights into Regional Development*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2020, p. 439, [http://doi.org/10.9770/IRD.2020.2.1\(3\)](http://doi.org/10.9770/IRD.2020.2.1(3)).

⁴ K. Booth, Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist, [in:] *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, eds. K. Krause, M.C. Williams, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [cop. 1997], p. 106.

⁵ S. Elbe, “Should HIV/AIDS Be Securitised? The Ethical Dilemmas of Linking HIV/AIDS and Security”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, issue 1, 2006, pp. 119–144, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006.00395.x>; C. McInnes, S. Rushton, “HIV/AIDS and securitization theory”, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 19, issue 1, 2013, pp. 115–138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111425258>.

⁶ J. Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, London – New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 57.

⁷ P. Roe, “Is securitization a ‘negative’ concept? Revisiting the normative debate over normal versus extraordinary politics”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 43, issue 3, 2012, pp. 249–266, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010612443723>.

⁸ P. Hough, *Environmental Security: An Introduction*, London – New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 23.

⁹ A. Oels, From ‘Securitization’ of Climate Change to ‘Climatization’ of the Security Field: Comparing Three Theoretical Perspectives, [in:] *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict*, eds. J. Scheffran, M. Brzoska, H.G. Brauch, P.M. Link, J. Schilling, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 2012, p. 185, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-28626-1_9.

The process of creating a security threat takes place through the “acts of speech” which highlight the danger associated with the issue, raise its political profile and justify the need for exceptional measures. In the first phase (identification), the issue is identified as a threat; in the subsequent phase (mobilisation), a request for emergency action is made.¹⁰ This act involves two key players: the elite, who handle the securitisation and who are responsible for presenting the issue at hand through the lens of securitised conditions, and the general public, which justifies securitisation of the threat and the need for exceptional measures.

In the 21st century, securitisation processes have been intensified. The approach of analysing such areas as health care, finance, economy, or the environment through the prism of security is becoming common, and risk management practices are regularly used to manage vulnerability in such areas as epidemic threat, stock market volatility control, registration, control and profiling the behaviour of individuals as part of ensuring public safety and migration, as well as managing climate change scenarios.¹¹

The popularity of the ST resulted in its multidimensional criticism. Among numerous examples of critics and modifications, one of the most interesting critics of the Copenhagen School is Rita Floyd,¹² who not only pointed out the gaps in the classical theory of securitisation, but also proposed her own normative approach, which over time resulted in the just securitisation theory (JST). Her last monograph significantly titled: *The Morality of Security* organises existing considerations about the shortcomings of the classic ST and proposes its own normative approach included in the theory of morally justified securitisation. The basic difference between this approach and her theory proposed by the Copenhagen School is, first of all, the existential threat itself, which – according to Floyd – should be objective (recognised as such, among others, thanks to research on the sincerity of potential aggressors). Thierry Balzacq – who noticed that while it is difficult to identify objective threats to security, objective existential threats can already be successfully enumerated.¹³ Secondly, according to Floyd, it

¹⁰ P. Roe, “Actor, Audience(s) and Emergency Measures: Securitization and the UK’s Decision to Invade Iraq”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 39, issue 6, 2008, pp. 615–635, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010608098212>.

¹¹ C. Hardy, S. Maguire, “Organizing risk: Discourse, power, and ‘riskification’”, *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2016, p. 83, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2013.0106>.

¹² R. Floyd, “Can securitization theory be used in normative analysis? Towards a just securitization theory”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 42, issue 4–5, 2011, pp. 427–439, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418712>; *eadem*, “Extraordinary or ordinary emergency measures: what, and who, defines the ‘success’ of securitization?”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 29, issue 2, 2016, pp. 677–694, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2015.1077651>; *eadem*, *Security and the environment: Securitisation theory and US environmental security policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511730146>.

¹³ T. Balzacq, “The three faces of securitization: Political, agency, audience, and context”, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11, issue 2, 2005, pp. 171–201, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052960>.

does not matter whether the recipients of the speech act accept it or not (which was crucial for the Copenhagen School) because the essence is the practice of security, the implementation of specific policies and not just accepting their description.¹⁴ This can be illustrated by the following equation:

$$\text{ST: SECURITISATION} = \text{SECURITISATION MOVEMENT} + \text{AUDIENCE ACCEPTANCE}$$

where the securitisation movement can be understood as a justification for an existential threat

$$\text{JST: SECURITISATION} = \text{SECURITISATION MOVEMENT} + \text{SECURITY PRACTICE.}$$

According to Floyd, securitisation occurs not “when’ the audience accepts an existential risk justification, but when there is a change in the entity’s behaviour that is justified by using a reference to the claimed threat. [...] Securitisation becomes effective through the fact that it took place without the need to break the normal rules or impose emergency measures” (it was enough that the existential threat was justified and “practice” was introduced).¹⁵ Securitisation is successful only when the identification of the threat justifying the securitisation movement is followed by a change in the behaviour (action) of the securitisation actor (or someone else on their behalf), and when the action taken is justified by the securitisation actor by reference to the risk that has been identified and declared in the securitisation movement. The ultimate reference object is the human being, and security is not so much (not only) survival as the possibility of development (well-being).

Finally, according to Floyd, it is not necessary to use extraordinary methods to solve securitised issues. “Standard emergency measures” enshrined in the constitutions of liberal democracies will suffice, i.e., introducing new legal provisions in line with existing procedures; introducing new powers to manage a crisis situation within the existing legal order, approved by the relevant courts; and finally, the use of the existing security apparatus and legislation on states of emergency to deal with issues that have not been discussed before.

The aim of the research presented in this article was to analyse how the migration-security nexus has influenced social mobilisation in Poland after 1989. The presented research problem is contained in the question whether social mobilisation in Poland after 1989 was caused by the combination of migration issues with security issues and in what forms.

¹⁴ R. Floyd, *Security and the environment...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ Eadem, “Extraordinary or ordinary...”, *op. cit.*, p. 691.

Materials and Methods

Migration as a matter of security

“Migration is more and more often interpreted as a security problem”, Didier Bigo wrote in 2006. He noted that “the popularity of adopting this prism of security is not an expression of traditional responses to the increase in uncertainty, crime, terrorism, and the negative effects of globalisation, as is often believed, but a result of the continuity of threats and general anxiety in which many different actors place their fears and beliefs in the process of creating a risky and dangerous society.”¹⁶

While presenting migration issues as a security issue has a long tradition, the turning point was undoubtedly the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, which reminded global community of the role that migrants can play in the security sphere. When it became clear that the perpetrators of the attacks were migrants staying in the USA temporarily or illegally, the US migration services began to act with multiplied force, looking at migrants from the perspective of state security. The Patriot Act, the control of migration by the Department of Homeland Security, and the stricter procedures of the new migration policy completed the matter. Soon, many of the American solutions were implemented in Europe, after the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005), Paris (2015), Nice (2016), Brussels (2016), and Berlin (2016). The consensus on linking migration policy with security issues was only strengthened by events such as the 2015 migration crisis in Europe. Securitisation, and even “crimmigration”, seems to be a trend that in recent years has covered the humanitarian perspective of looking at migrants through the prism of human rights, which, in their case, are violated or limited.

Hence, the securitisation of migration is perceived by some researchers as groundless, and sometimes also harmful. Many assessments of the securitisation processes point out their “irrationality” and “exaggeration”.¹⁷ As Jef Huysmans notes, “[...] in political debates about immigration and asylum, and about the regulation of the free movement of people in the European Union, migration has easily emerged as an existential threat to the state, society, and/or the completion of the internal market.”¹⁸ According to Will Kymlicka, in Central and Eastern Europe most state authorities believe that any minority autonomy constitutes an existential threat and

¹⁶ D. Bigo, “Internal and External Aspects of Security”, *European Security*, vol. 15, issue 4, 2006, p. 385, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830701305831>.

¹⁷ B. Mcsweeney, “Identity and security: Buzan and the Copenhagen school”, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 22, issue 1, 1996, pp. 81–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210500118467>.

¹⁸ J. Huysmans, “The Question of the Limit: Desecuritisation and the Aesthetics of Horror in Political Realism”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, vol. 27, issue 3, 1998, p. 569, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298980270031301>.

presents it as such to their societies.¹⁹ This exaggeration – according to Paul Roe – requires that the situation regarding migration should be desecuritized and transferred to “ordinary politics,” at least in part. Roe points out that the occurrence of the securitisation process of the indigenous minorities problem mainly concerns the Central and Eastern Europe. In the west of the Old Continent, this appears on a relatively small scale. In this part of Europe, there is a tendency to treat the issue of national and ethnic minorities and their rights rather in the context of justice, while in Central and Eastern Europe it is precisely through the prism of security.²⁰ In this respect, despite the desecuritisation of the issue of minority rights, postulated by Will Kymlicka or Matti Jutila,²¹ for which there are no grounds for treating it as an existential threat for the whole society.

Migration in the Polish discourse and practice.

Five case studies of social mobilisation

The migration issues in the Polish discourse were presented and interpreted differently in the 20th and 21st centuries. After 1989, 5 different phases and 5 different attitudes can be distinguished, reflected in public discourse or decisions made by decision-makers, and in the directions of social mobilisation. In each of these periods, migration issues were related to security, at times through a very strong securitisation process.

1. The 1989–2001 period was devoted to the issues of the Polish diaspora around the world, the repatriation of Poles, especially from beyond the eastern border, and redressing the wrongs committed against them. At that time, problems such as ensuring their safety, including the right to keep their identity, and their safe return to the homeland were the most important in public discourse and practice. The rhetoric of moral obligation and the practice of repatriation and providing financial support were dominant.
2. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the USA and subsequent attacks in Europe, carried out by migrants or their descendants, were the beginning of the connotation: a migrant, especially from a Muslim country, is a terrorist. However, the rhetoric of a distant threat dominated public discourse. It had to be fought through the participation of the Polish Armed Forces in operations abroad. The situation lasted until 2014/2015. The rhetoric of distant

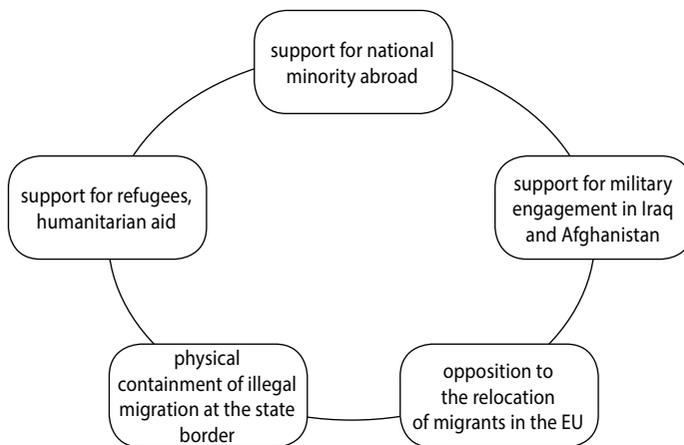
¹⁹ W. Kymlicka, Justice and Security in the Accommodation of Minority Nationalism: Comparing East and West, [in:] *The Politics of Belonging: Nationalism, Liberalism and Pluralism*, ed. A. Dieckhoff, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004, p. 128.

²⁰ P. Roe, “Securitization and minority rights: Conditions of desecuritization”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 35, issue 3, 2004, pp. 279–280, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010604047527>.

²¹ M. Jutila, “Desecuritizing Minority Rights: Against Determinism”, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 37, issue 2, 2006, pp. 167–185, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010606066169>.

- threats and the practice of combating threats outside the Republic of Poland dominated.
3. The 2015 migration crisis in Europe introduced near-threatening rhetoric of a multi-dimensional nature. The migrant might not only be a potential terrorist, but most of all, posed a threat to economic security (employment, social benefits) and cultural security (domination of Islam). Near-threatening rhetoric and the practice of stopping the influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa to Poland dominated.
 4. The migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, triggered by Alexander Lukashenka in the summer of 2021 by pushing out economic migrants brought to Belarus from the Middle East and North Africa and defined as a direct threat to the security of the Republic of Poland, was stopped by the available regular and emergency measures. The rhetoric of the country's defence and the practice of protecting the state border dominated.
 5. The war in Ukraine, which began with the invasion of the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, resulted in the arrival of almost 1.5 million refugees (children, women, older adults) in Poland in the first two weeks of the invasion. They were widely recognised as requiring systemic and individual humanitarian aid. The rhetoric of moral obligation and the practice of organising extensive support for the refugees arriving in Poland dominated.
- This is graphically represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Five phases/attitudes to migration-security nexus in Poland



Source: Author's own study. The indicated phases and attitudes were analysed using the theoretical framework of the securitisation theory and just securitisation theory.

Results

Table 1 presents an analysis of the provided phases/attitudes towards the issue of migration presented in Poland after 1989. In the case of ST, the following elements of the securitisation process were examined: (1) identification of existential threat; (2) recommendation emergency measures; (3) the audience's acceptance; and (4) desecuritisation. In the case of JST, in accordance with the assumptions of this theory, the following were examined: (1) intentions of the securitising actor; (2) the objectivity of existential threat; (3) security practice, i.e., extraordinary measures taken; and (4) desecuritisation.

This study allowed to identify situations in which securitisation was just or unjust. Moreover, the comparison of the results of the analysis regarding the proposed emergency measures (ST) and the security practice (JST) allowed to indicate that:

- 1) in the case of the repatriation issue and support for the Polish diaspora, the social mobilisation consisted in providing them with multidimensional support;
- 2) as regards the issue of deterring potential migrant terrorists, the public mobilisation consisted in support for participating in the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan;
- 3) in the case of the policy towards migrants within the territory of the EU, the public mobilisation consisted in expressing opposition to the relocation of migrants to Poland;
- 4) in the case of the migration crisis triggered on the border with Belarus by the Lukashenka regime, the public mobilisation consisted in the physical stopping of migration;
- 5) in the case of war refugees from Ukraine, the public mobilisation consisted in the provision of safe shelter and humanitarian aid.

Discussion

As the presented results show, the processes of securitisation in Poland after 1989 took place at least five times in relation to various aspects of the migration issues. In two cases, they dealt with just securitisation – the intentions of securitisation actors could be considered fair, the threat – objectively existential, and the security practice occurred. These situations relate to cases from the recent past: the migration crisis caused on the Polish-Belarusian border by Alekander Lukashenka and the humanitarian crisis caused by Vladimir Putin and the war in Ukraine.

In the next three cases, the securitisation processes were carried out in accordance with the ST: the existential threat and extraordinary measures to combat it were indicated, and the audience's opinion was also taken into consideration. These threats: the situation of the Polish diaspora in the East, potential migrant terrorists

Table 1. Analysis of five attitudes towards migration in terms of securitisation theory and just securitisation theory

Phase / attitude	SECURITISATION THEORY Copenhagen School (Barry Buzan, Ole Weaver, Jaap de Wilde)			JUST SECURITISATION THEORY (Rita Floyd)			
	Existential threat	Emergency measures	Audience acceptance	Desecuritisation (as of March 2022)	The intentions of the securitising actor	Objectivity of existential threat	Security practice
Repatriation and support of the Polish community	Poles abroad, especially in the East, do not have the conditions to live a normal life and maintain contact with their native culture	Special rules of repatriation, the Poles' Card for people with Polish roots	UNJUST SECURITISATION				
			By accepting the election postulates	Completed – care for the Polish diaspora has been institutionalised and transferred to the category of ordinary politics	Difficult to unambiguously assess	The threat did not have the existential dimension – it was possible to solve it through "normal politics"	Extraordinary assistance solutions and special repatriation rules were introduced
Stop potential migrant terrorists	Terrorist attacks in the USA were carried out by terrorists-migrants. They can also do it in Poland	Participation of the Polish Armed Forces in the operation in Afghanistan	UNJUST SECURITISATION				
			Acceptance through the formula of a debate over all political options	Completed in 2014, when threats considered to be more probable appeared (a direct military attack on the territory of the Republic of Poland)	The main intention of the securitisation actor was to obtain "audience" approval for the foreign operations of the Polish Armed Forces, important from the point of view of NATO membership and allied relations	The threat was not existential for Poland due to the insignificant number of migrants	The Polish Armed Forces took part in operations and were deployed to Afghanistan in 2001–2014
Opposition to the relocation of migrants to Poland within the EU	Relocated from camps in other EU countries, migrants in Poland may commit terrorist attacks and cause other threats, as is the case in other European countries	Blockade of the EU relocation mechanism	UNJUST SECURITISATION				
			Political debate during the election campaign and the victory of the parties proposing to stop the mechanism	Not completed, but the problem was solved by the relocation mechanism by the EU Commission	The main intention of the securitising actor was to gain more electoral support	The small number of migrants proposed for relocation did not constitute an existential threat	Yes, relocation has been stopped

Phase / attitude	SECURITISATION THEORY			JUST SECURITISATION THEORY				
	Existential threat	Emergency measures	Audience acceptance	Desecuritisation (as of March 2022)	The intentions of the securitising actor	Objectivity of existential threat	Security practice	Desecuritisation / re-securitisation
To stop the illegal migration generated by Lukashenka	Illegal aggressive migrants steered by the Lukashenka regime to destabilise Poland and other EU countries	A state of emergency, building a wall at the border, sending troops and other formations there to strengthen the border guard	Acceptance through appeal to society – public opinion polls	Not completed	The intentions can be considered fair due to the scale of the threat (the number of mass illegal border crossing attempts and the aggressive behaviour of some illegal migrants)	The threat should be considered existential due to the scale of the problem	Yes, the containment process continues	Not completed
			JUST SECURITISATION					
Aid for war refugees from Ukraine	The humanitarian crisis triggered by the migration of refugees caused by the war in Ukraine	Extensive and systemic aid from the state, non-governmental organisations and a great spurt of citizens, a special act defining the status of Ukrainian refugees in Poland	By consent of all political forces in Parliament to a special act	Not completed	The intentions can be considered fair due to the scale of the problem (1.5 million refugees in Poland within the first two weeks of the war)	The threat should be considered existential due to the scale of the problem	Yes, the humanitarian aid process is ongoing	Not completed
			JUST SECURITISATION					

Source: Author's own study.

from Afghanistan, and potential migrants who came to Poland under the EU relocation mechanism did not constitute an objective existential threat due to the small scale of the problem or a low probability of its occurrence. Thus, these securitisation processes cannot be considered just, according to the JST.

In the described processes, political and social mobilisation were used both to protect the host country from the threat posed or constituted by migrants and to protect the migrants' security – whether it was people who often remain outside their homeland or war refugees. In both situations, whose importance was significant, and the influence was powerful: this is evidenced, for example, by security practices and implemented emergency measures, elections won by parties securitising migrations, or, finally, the constant presence of migration issues in political discourse.

Conclusions

Migrations, especially of groups of people with different cultural and religious identities than the host country, will remain one of the principal threats in social perception, which will probably maintain their strong securitisation (contrary to the postulates of Rita Floyd and her JST). Different identities, combined with radicalism or nationalism (sometimes in a separatist version), but also poverty and demographic changes, will shape the society's view of potential and present newcomers and national migration policies. On the self-stranger dichotomy, in Europe alone, many political parties will capitalise on the neighbour/stranger discrimination and win more regardless of emerging security challenges.

The conducted analysis shows, however, that nexus migration-security cannot be viewed solely from the perspective of the host country's security. Equally important is the perspective of migrants' security, not only war refugees but also, for example, own emigrants or people staying outside the state not voluntarily, which necessitates a sustainable approach in research on migration securitisation processes.

The presented results indicate that in the process of extending the security category, it is important to study the intentions of securitising actors and the existential dimension of the reported threats due to the power of influence and the effects of securitisation measures.

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Just/unjust securitisation and social mobilisation

Abstract

As a process of broadening the security category, securitisation is used to draw attention to urgent and existential threats that cannot be resolved through ordinary political decisions. It presupposes the authorisation of extraordinary measures as long as they are accepted by the "audience" (the elite or society as a whole). Due to the growing importance of these processes, more and more objections and doubts have been formulated towards the theory of securitisation regarding, inter alia, the morality of these processes, including the intentions of securitising actors (just or unjust securitisation). This article presents case studies on the Poland's migration policy, in which securitisation movements reinforced social mobilisation by referring to the category of security. The methodological framework of the securitisation theory and the just securitisation theory have been implemented. The presented results indicate that in the process of extending the security category, it is important to study the intentions of securitising actors and the existential dimension of the reported threats due to the power of influence and the effects of securitisation measures.

Key words: securitisation, social mobilisation, migration policy, illegal migration, unauthorized migration, Poland