

## THE GRIM PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON EUROPEAN SECURITY CULTURE

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Is it possible for all EU member (and candidate) states to have a common European security culture? No, is the obvious answer. At least this was the conclusion from the Cambridge University - European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) conference that took place in Cambridge this last July<sup>1</sup>. Representatives from each EU Member State (plus Egypt, Croatia and Turkey) presented their country's security culture, the underlying reasons behind it, and discussed whether securitization<sup>2</sup> has a particular impact on the development of that culture.

The reason behind the absence of a common European security policy is the fact that EU members and candidates are far from having a homogeneous perception of what constitutes a threat to their countries. Not surprisingly, the diverse threat perceptions are a major obstacle towards the development such a common culture. The focus of this article is on three areas: the domestic versus the common European security culture; the threats and their impact on specific referent objects; and when securitization could play a significant role in the promotion of a common security agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> The Summer School Programme was co-organized by the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the University of Cambridge. The event took place between the 14th and 17th of July, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Securitization is a term coined by the Copenhagen School scholars (mainly Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver). It is the process through which non-politicized issues first become politicized (i.e. subject of political debate), then presented as existential threats, and as such enter the realm of emergency politics. The securitizing actors persuade their audience that a specific issue is a security and existential threat to them and as such extraordinary measures are required). According to the School, securitization could occur in a number of sectors, namely political, military, societal, economic and environmental, with each one having specific referent objects such as identity, sovereignty, economy, etc.

### *a. Domestic Vs Common European Security Culture*

For any multi-unit entity to have a common security culture, the units that comprise the entity must share a common perception of what constitutes a threat. The EU is no exception. But, as mentioned, this does not seem to be the case in the Union and its periphery, as in most cases the perception of what is a significant threat differs considerably from state to state. As a result there is an unavoidable clash between domestic security cultures and a common European one. Indeed there is not even an official definition of what a European security culture is, much less a common one.

It is not surprising that each state would like to see its own security issues defined as (common) European security issues, as this would allow for the development of a common agenda on how to deal with the problem. However, this is not an easy task even for powerful states such as the UK that may like to promote a specific security agenda. The reality is that the domestic security culture will always prevail over any (proposed) common European Security Culture if the former is incompatible with the latter. States that have particular security issues to deal with, be it internal or external, deal with them almost exclusively and subsequently downgrade the importance of other European security issues, such as immigration or terrorism, which might be promoted by other EU member states (e.g. the UK). The cases of Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey and to a lesser degree Croatia, Slovenia and the Baltic states are indicative examples.

The degree of threat internalization is an equally important factor. The deeply internalized perceptions of security threats (as well as enemies) that states have create unique 'domestic' security cultures that cannot easily be integrated into a common European security culture, enhancing thus the incompatibility between the two.

### *b. Same Threat, Different Impact*

That each country has a different perception of what constitutes a threat for them is not surprising. However, what is many times counter intuitive is that each state may view a specific issue as a security threat for different reasons. The most obvious example is the issue of immigration. Spain, for example perceives the increase in immigration as a social and economic threat. Malta on the other hand sees immigration as a demographic problem and as such it considers it to be one of the most important security threats the country faces. This is because what is at risk for the Maltese is not just the economic prosperity of the country but rather the survival of the Maltese identity. Similarly, the issue of Turkish settlers in Cyprus creates a security threat for Greek (and Turkish) Cypriots where the referent object at risk is (among other) their identity. Therefore, it becomes obvious that defining the referent object under threat is just as important as defining the threats *per se*.

There is, therefore, a 'second degree' of incompatibility that goes beyond the different threat perceptions, namely that of the endangered referent objects (e.g. economy, identity, social cohesion, etc). The implications are rather obvious: the measures each state will take to tackle a threat depend on the endangered referent object (e.g. economy, identity, etc) and not necessarily on the threat *per se*. But if this is indeed the case, then there are also implications on the development of a common European security agenda, since even if the threats are the same (e.g. immigration), the referent objects in danger may not be, meaning that it will be particularly difficult for all member states to come up with a universally acceptable agenda on how to deal with the threats.

### *c. Securitization Could Work...But Not Always*

Can securitization play a major role in the development of a common European security culture? More specifically, is it possible to securitize specific issues, such as transnational terrorism or immigration to a degree that it becomes part of a common European security culture? This is what some states, such as the UK and

the US, hope to achieve; promote the security issues that are the most important to them as common European security issues. However, so far their attempts to create such common existential threats remain relatively unsuccessful, with the exception of some cases. In Portugal for example, terrorism is considered to be the number one threat (and is treated as such by the government) even though the country has not suffered from any transnational terrorism in the past three decades and is not involved in any activities that could trigger terrorist attacks in the future. It must be noted though, that Portugal is not preoccupied with other 'hard' security threats (e.g. border disputes).

Overall, however, the securitizing actors (in this case UK and US) have been unsuccessful in most cases, primarily because the majority of EU member states remain largely unaffected from terrorism and they have other security issues to deal with, which are, most times, better securitized by domestic securitizing actors. Even for countries such as Greece that has 'internal' terrorism, the issue of terrorism is still relatively low in the country's 'hierarchy of concerns', not least because it is preoccupied with other security issues such as the Turkish border disputes over the Aegean.

What could be concluded is that the securitization of some issues and their promotion as part of a common European security culture could succeed if (a) they have a direct effect on the state (e.g. immigration), and (b) if the country does not have other domestic security issues that are deeply internalized and require much more attention.