

The Securitization of the European Migrant Crisis (2015-2016): Applying the Insights of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies to a Comparative Analysis of Refugee Policies in Bulgaria and Hungary

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Abstract : The migrant crisis, which peaked in 2015-2016, posed an unprecedented challenge to the European Union's (EU) newest member states, including Bulgaria and Hungary. Their governments had to formulate sound migration policies with expediency and sensitivity to the needs of millions of people fleeing violent conflicts in the Middle East and failed states in North Africa. Political leaders in post-communist countries had to carefully coordinate with other EU member states on joint policies and solutions while minimizing the risk of alienating their increasingly anti-migrant domestic constituents. Post-communist member states' governments chose distinct policy responses to the crisis, which were dictated by factors such as their governments' partisan stances on migration, their views of the European Union, and the decision to frame the crisis as a security or a humanitarian issue. This paper explores how two Bulgarian governments (Boyko Borisov's second and third government formed during the 43rd and 44th Bulgarian National Assembly, respectively) navigated the processes of EU migration policy making and managing the expectations of their electorates. Based on a comparative analysis of refugee policies in Bulgaria and Hungary during the height of the crisis (2015-2016) and a temporal analysis of refugee policies in Bulgaria (2015-2018), the paper advances the following conclusions. Drawing on insights of the Copenhagen school of security studies, the paper argues that cultural concerns dominated domestic debates in both Bulgaria and Hungary; both governments framed the issue predominantly as a matter of security rather than humanitarian disaster. Regardless of the similarities in issue framing, however, the two governments sought different paths of tackling the crisis. While the Bulgarian government demonstrated its willingness to comply with EU decisions (such as the proposal for mandatory quotas for refugee relocation), the Hungarian government defied EU directives and became a leading voice of dissent inside the EU. The current Bulgarian government (April 2017 - present) appears to be committed to complying with EU decisions and accepts the strategy of EU burden-sharing, while the Hungarian government has continually snubbed the EU's appeals for cooperation despite the risk of hefty financial penalties. Hungary's refugee policies have been influenced by the parliamentary representation of the far right-wing party Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), which has encouraged the majority party (FIDESZ) to adopt harsher anti-migrant rhetoric and more hostile policies toward refugees. Bulgaria's current government is a coalition of the center-right Citizens for a European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and its far right-wing junior partners - the United Patriots (comprised of three nationalist political parties). The parliamentary presence of Jobbik in Hungary's parliament has magnified the anti-migrant stance, rhetoric, and policies of Mr. Orbán's Civic Alliance; we have yet to observe a substantial increase in the anti-migrant rhetoric and policies in Bulgaria's case. Analyzing responses to the migrant/refugee crisis is a critical opportunity to understand how issues of cultural identity and belonging, inclusion and exclusion, regional integration and disintegration are debated and molded into policy in Europe's youngest member states in the broader EU context.

Keywords : Copenhagen School, migrant crisis, refugees, security

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