

DECONSTRUCTING REALITIES AND FRAMING POLICIES IN THE NEW EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS

Conference proceedings

Edited by
ANA NIKODINOVSKA KRSTEVSKA
OLGA KOSHEVALISKA

UNIVERSITY GOCE DELČEV – ŠTIP
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bord[EU]r

Jean Monnet Network

“BordEUR: New European Borderlands” is a collaborative research project of nine European universities, Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. BordEUR documents and assesses the proliferation of new borders in the aftermath of the European Union’s (EU) recent crises (the Eurozone crisis, the so-called migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic), which in various ways, were crises of those very borders. We suggest that the refugee and migration issue in particular go well beyond policy and institutions, and instead instantiates a fundamental uncertainty that faces not just the EU, but liberal democracy in general. This multi-faceted global crisis of capitalism and liberal democracy resulted in a worldwide pushback taking multiple forms, but populism and its European rightwing variant in particular merit. The right-wing populist interpretation of European politics (including migration) namely puts the focus squarely back on bordered nation states, away from supranational units. First, only nation states can erect and maintain borders, and second, the threat itself (societal security and terrorism) is also primarily framed on the state level. BordEUR situates the question of (re)emergent borders in the context of this populist pushback against a crisis-ridden liberal democratic status quo.



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THE IMPLICATIONS OF BORDERING PRACTICES IN RELATIONS BETWEEN ITALY AND THE EU⁶

MICHELA CECCORULLI⁷

Key concepts

- **Securitisation:** representation/framing of an issue/group as existential threat to a polity/ 'people'
- **BORDERS:** 'Soft' and 'hard' features that structure social orders; they both 'mediate' or 'separate' social communities.
- **Ontological security:** According to Mitzen, "ontological security refers to the need to experience oneself as a whole, continuous person in time — as being rather than constantly changing — in order to realize a sense of agency".⁸

Key Questions and Answers

1. Why and how did different crises impact Italy's bordering processes?
 - The economic crisis first (2008), the 'refugee crisis' then (2015) and lastly the COVID pandemic (2020-) have repeatedly questioned the country's **ontological security**
 - The fallout of the 'refugee crisis' (2015) on Italy's bordering process is of particular interest
 - When inflows towards the country peaked in 2016 different political majorities faced rising **insecurity** through the definition of different sets of borders:
 - ✓ defining the perimeter of the national political community with respect to the EU
 - ✓ defining the limes of the EU's border
 - ✓ reframing the borders of Italy's national identity
2. Which shape did they take?
 - Definition of the national community: Italy has tried to define a **perfect matching** between its borders and those of the Union – Italy's strongly voices for shared duties
 - ✓ This logic has been a constant in Italy's discourse **irrespective of political colours** (2016-2021 – Center-left/centre right coalition)

⁶ Summary of Bord[eu]r Jean Monnet Project project presentation, December 2021.

⁷ Michela Ceccorulli is Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Bologna. She is also Adjunct Professor at the Dickinson Center for European Studies (Dickinson College) in Bologna and Associate Fellow at the Forum on the Problems of Peace and War in Florence.

⁸ Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 24, 2006)

- (2016-2028); yellow-green coalition (2018-2019); five-star movements/centre/centre-left parties (2019-2021)
- ✓ Example: debate about search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean
 - Reconfiguration of the Union's geographic border: Italy's has constantly tried to stretch the **external border southwards** to directly engage with origin or transit countries and diminish outflows
 - ✓ This logic has been a constant **irrespective of political colours**, although with differences mainly in **tones and focus**
 - ✓ Deep implications on relations with the neighbourhood (broader and deeper relations on migration)
 - ✓ Example: a narration overlapping the border of the EU with the Southern border of Libya (starting from 2017)
 - Reframing of Italy's national identity: Italy's has set boundaries to makes sense of the national community and of the values underpinning its political action
 - ✓ This practice has **never been fully consistent** along the political spectrum, mixing accommodating and inclusive with limiting and disregarding stances
 - ✓ However: populist and anti-immigration formations (2018-2019) have challenged Italy's ontology
 - ✓ Examples: Security Decrees (2018); Abstention from the Global Compact on Migration (2018)

Key normative/ theoretical question

3. How has this affected the European Union?

- Bordering practices observed since the refugee crisis seem to suggest that Italy has undertaken actions having **more severe consequences on migrants** when **lack of solidarity** among EU's Member States has been more evident
 - ✓ Stark examples are cooperation with Libya (deeply criticised) and the tight on NGOs (seemingly strong criticised)
- Lack of solidarity and Italy's related practices impact also on the **EU's actorness**
 - ✓ The discontinuation of Operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia (2020) represents a clear impairment
- Lack of solidarity has further aggravated Italy's schizophrenic boundaries exercises, which time and again have mostly reacted to (created or inevitable) **emergencies** at its borders
 - ✓ Quarantine vessels during the pandemic, a denigrating narrative on protection duties coupled with securitarian moves and the definition of a list of safe countries of origin (unprecedented in the Italian case) stands as telling examples
- Given the co-constitutive nature of Italy and EU's borders (Italy being a key player on the governance of migration), Italy's bordering practices impact EU's ontology, mostly undermining it

Policy implications:

The EU (and most progressive actors) should strongly put efforts and advance the cause of solidarity among the Member States, for the issue has a clear impact on its own ontology. The Pact on Migration and Asylum seems to be too timid on that respect: search and rescue activities in the Mediterranean and the Dublin Regulation should be put upfront to avoid that Italy, a key actor on migration, is dragged and drags herself the EU into ever more restrictive and ultimately damaging practices. Solidarity should keep up with EU's ambitions as a liberal and value-based actor and not be intended to lower these down.

Theoretical implications:

Border studies should be more effectively linked to European and IR studies. In fact, more efforts should be paid by scholars to consider the nature and meaning of borders not only for migrants but also for other actors and the EU itself, to grasp their functions, dynamics and their meaning for the EU as an actor. Italy plays a performative role in the construction of the (Southern) border of the European Union. Her actions are simultaneously affected and affect not only the European border but also its ontology.