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Bordering Power Europe? The mobility-bordering nexus in and by the European Union

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Bordering Power Europe? The mobility-bordering nexus in and by the European Union

Abstract:

The EU has been built on the idea that enhanced transnational relations and free movement of persons between Member States have a positive impact on international cooperation and hence on security. However, what we have witnessed in the past decade is a growing pressure to limit mobility, reinvigorated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Calls for a strengthened Schengen area go together with the externalization of European borders and the involvement of third states, but also with the reintroduction of border functions between Member States. Inside the EU free movement has been reduced if not stopped for fear of terrorism, irregular migration or the spread of viruses. Besides this, new techniques to govern mobility have emerged, affecting the role and meaning of borders. This article focuses on three dynamics of this process that entail a transformation of sovereignty, territoriality and rights: the externalization of borders, internal rebordering and logistification. The article argues that by focusing on what borders do rather than discussing what borders are, we can observe a more comprehensive transformation of the meaning and practices of borders within, around and outside the EU, a transformation that goes beyond the Westphalian imaginary and the simplistic alternative between hard and soft borders.

Keywords: Borders, migration, covid, externalization, logistification.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) was built on the idea that enhanced transnational relations among states have a positive impact on international cooperation and hence on security (see introduction to this Special Issue). The integration process has been sustained first of all as an attempt to construct peace and security through the transformation of the meaning and practice of states' borders: the gradual introduction of exclusive or shared areas of EU competence, cooperation in building infrastructure, facilitated transborder mobility introduced with the single market and the Schengen agreement, and the creation of specific transnational programmes, of which Erasmus is one of the best known, are milestones of European integration which have also been multipliers of transnational relations and modifiers of international borders. In other words, the EU has reinterpreted and redefined the meaning of its Member States' borders and this has represented one of the most important – albeit not the most

studied – aspects of its post-Westphalian (Caporaso 1996; Schmidt 2104) or pre-Westphalian (Zielonka 2013) character.

In the past decade, however, we have witnessed a process of hardening of borders both within (among its Member States) and outside (vis à vis and among third states) the EU. We have witnessed calls for, and practices of, enhanced border control at the external borders of the EU, but also between Member States. EU external borders have been hardened and internal freedom of movement has been reduced - if not stopped - for fear of terrorism, irregular migration or the spread of viruses (from mad cow disease to Covid-19). Particularly in relation to the so-called migrant crisis of 2015-2016, scholars have explored the relationship between processes of collective securitization of migration (that is to say the practice whereby EU elites and Member States have contributed to creating a narrative and practice of migration control as if it were a threat to security[i]) and practices of border control (Ceccorulli 2019; Leonard and Kaunert 2020; Baker-Beall 2019) as well as the negative impact of these aspects on migrants (e.g., Fontana 2021; Squire 2020). However, the literature has focused particularly on the dynamics of the hardening of borders either inside (Casella Colombeau 2020; Montaldo 2020) or outside the EU (Casas-Cortes et al 2016; Oliveira-Martins and Strange 2019), while we aim to explore the overall process of transformation of the meaning and practice of borders in and by the European migration system of governance (EU and Member States; cf. Ceccorulli, Fassi and Lucarelli 2021), encompassing the internal and external dimension. In particular, what we propose to do in this article is threefold. In the first place, we aim to explore different meanings of borders, showing how 'harder' and 'softer' borders do in fact coexist in terms of the 'function' they perform, frequently in a mutually constitutive way. Secondly, we want to show that far from consisting of the mere introduction of enhanced controls (particularly targeted at migrants) at the borders of European states, the processes of re-bordering and trans-bordering take on different forms that create functional borders across European countries and in third countries. In exploring the overall border transformation in/by Europe, we will focus on three dynamics in the redefinition of borders in which a transformation of sovereignty, territoriality and rights is embedded: the externalization of borders, internal bordering and the logistification of borders. Finally, we aim to show that the EU/European response to the 'crisis' of 2015/6 accelerated processes that were already underway, and created the conditions for enhancing bordering practices when Covid-19 hit Europe. Eventually, we argue, bordering practices in and by the EU have repercussions on a wider process of transformation of what borders are and how they are employed as instruments of governance, on transnational relations in the broad sense of the term and ultimately on the EU as a polity. Moments of 'crisis' – of human mobility or the transmission of illness – have accelerated these

ongoing processes. By exploring the above aspects, the article should help to grasp some elements of the concrete forms taken by 'European transnationalism' as discussed in this Special Issue.

The article is organized as follows: we will first explain our understanding of borders beyond the dichotomy between hard and soft borders. We will then analyze externalization, the hardening of internal borders and logistification as practices of bordering, and we will conclude with reflections on the implications of these processes for the EU.

1. Beyond dichotomies: *hard, soft* and *functional* borders

The definition of borders as 'hard' or 'soft' may vary depending on the context of observation. However, it is generally used to describe a 'dilemma' between borders as 'closed', 'exclusive' or 'barriers' – *hard* – versus borders as 'open', 'porous' or 'bridges' – *soft* (Neuwahl 2020). While 'hard' borders are associated with the traditional image of territorial borders, the relatively recent paradigm of 'soft' borders aims to encompass the dense connections that exist in border areas and a flexible, negotiable, experience of the border (Mostov 2008). However, both definitions are used figuratively to describe alternative ways of seeing and implementing physical borders. Going beyond this alternative, we take stock of the discussions around the transformation and multiplication of borders to contend that 'empirically […] borders are often hardening and softening at the same time' and 'it is the quality of the social relations that are constituted and reproduced by and through borders that matters' (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 279).

In parallel with globalization processes, borders have transformed with regard to capital flows and production networks. Geographical borders have become more porous with movements of capital and supply chains. At the same time, bordering functions have increased within territories of states through the formation of zones, corridors and infrastructure spaces (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 205-241). This shift has also involved labour mobility, with the formation of the logistics of migration that allows people to move across borders in an increasingly transnational labour market. The analysis of these types of migration infrastructure in the context of European policies, which involve both private and state actors, led Xiang and Lindquist (2014, 143) to argue that Europe, far from passively receiving an unstoppable human tide, was actually 'actively reconfiguring regional relations through migration infrastructure'.

We argue that the angle of migration helps us to grasp more pointily in which way borders have transformed along these processes beyond the Westphalian imaginary and the simplistic alternative between hard and soft borders. The fact that borders are increasingly crossed by different forms of flows and movements does not mean that they *have softened*: next to this seeming relaxation

of borders, stronger forms of containment and limitation of mobility have emerged. This is not only due to the strengthening of borders for non-EU citizens that accompanied the introduction of freedom of movement within the Schengen space. Particularly after the summer of migration of 2015, in fact, the control of geographical borders has regained centre stage in the political debate: militarized fences were erected along eastern borders, and patrols in the Mediterranean Sea have shifted their focus from search and rescue activities to save lives at sea, to policies oriented towards disrupting migrant smuggling and 'human trafficking', with deadly consequences (Migreurop 2019; Bevilaqua 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2018). The strengthening of external borders as a barrier to stem irregular migration has become a priority for the EU, to the point that president of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen (2020) referred to the Greek border as 'the European shield' in front of unregulated migration movements.

At the same time, the border itself has shifted from being situated exclusively in specific locations, normally along state territorial lines, to being a device of governance to be activated in different forms and places, based on long-term planning but also on the political reaction to specific contingences. What is relevant here is to observe that while the traditional function of borders as boundaries remains, the practice of bordering increasingly relies on flexible tools to be deployed almost *just-in-time* and *to-the-point* to respond to the increased diversification and shifting routes of migration flows, rather than their traditional territorial dimension. Examples in this direction are the newly formed European Border Coast Guard Agencythe 'hotspot approach' and how the production of data makes borders interoperable between different agencies and different States. In this regard practices of hardening and softening of borders often overlap and intertwine in the European Union, leading us to question the binary between hard and soft borders, and to define hard and soft borders by following different border functions, rather than by geographical location or clear-cut distinctions. In order to make sense of these developments, we analyse shifts involving the mobility-bordering nexus in the field of migration to advance operational definitions that go beyond the conceptual framework of Westphalian borders (based on the ontological and fixed description of what they *are*), and instead look at what borders *do*.

We conceive of *hard borders* as manifestations of bordering practices through physical and legal means such as blocking, containing, detaining and returning migrants, often implying the use of force. We see these practices as not limited to specific places, but as the result of the implementation of formal and informal policy priorities that can manifest themselves along geographical borders, at sea, inside the European territory or outside of it. Moreover, these practices can take the form of direct deployment of European force, be it from the EU or MSs, by other states as a consequence of agreements or partnerships with the EU, or by private actors enrolled in

operations of border enforcement within the framework of European schemes. The implementation of hard border functions may include the use of physical force at some point in the process, for example in the form of temporary detention, but may end with an administrative act, such as the release of the migrant under an unexecuted order to leave. Eurostat data (2021a and 2021b) show that the annual rate of third country nationals returned from the EU following an order to leave is less than one third of the third country nationals ordered to leave, which means that a practice directly related to a territorial definition of borders – an order to leave – results in most cases in a change of status within the territory.

Conversely, rather than simply the result of porous management of geographical boundaries, we conceive of *soft borders* as administrative, economic and bureaucratic practices of mobility control that attach specific conditionalities and the graduated recognition of rights and entitlements to having specific nationalities and documents, or being included in specific administrative categories. This includes legal migration schemes, international recruiting processes, temporary or circular migration, but also other forms such as, in the case of the EU, the posting of workers. There are various actors involved in these processes including states, local administration and bureaucracies, and private actors such as transnational agencies and brokers. Following this approach, hard and soft borders tend to overlap in a third dimension of the border, what we call the *functional border*. With this we point to practices and operations that act as forms of concretization of border functions, and the way these practices are intended to serve specific purposes.[1]

In our proposal all these dimensions may or may not imply the crossing of the EU's geographical borders.

The current reconfiguration of borders is the result of the externalization processes that project European borders outside the EU (as in the case of agreements with third countries to control arrivals to Europe, execute returns or streamline recruitment of migrant workers), as well as of practices which constitute, so to say, a manifestation of the border outside the frontier area (as in the case of visa policies, document management by local government offices and employers or police practices towards foreigners). In any case it is important to acknowledge that the *hardening* and *softening* of borders may overlap within the operational dimension of the *functional border*, and one dynamic exists in practice because the other exists and vice-versa. An example in this regard is the functioning of hotspots (see Section 4) where practices of physical containment coexist with administrative routines aimed at optimizing the movements of migrants towards the EU and their surveillance and management by different government agencies (Pollozek and Passoth 2019). We specifically introduce the *functional* element to highlight how the way borders are operationalized affects our

[1] For a similar, though not completely overlapping, use of the term, see Gropas 2004.

definition and perception of both migrants and borders (as well as migrants' experience of borders), and that the final meaning of borders is the result of a contentious process where forms of resistance and practices of border reinforcing 'are increasingly shaping the conditions under which border crossing is possible and actually practiced and experienced' (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 175).

In the next section we will employ this analytical framework to discuss different practices of re-bordering in relation to mobility that follow a spurious path with regard to the strict binary between hard and soft borders, namely: the externalization of European borders, the reintroduction of internal border checks within the Schengen area after 2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic, and the dynamics of logistification. In this way, we show how these three practices reveal structural changes in the European border regime enmeshed with the processes of securitization.

2. The Externalization of European borders

The externalization of European borders can be defined as the activation of a series of agreements, practices, and instruments to regulate, control or prevent access to goods, services or people to the EU extra-territorially and through third countries or agents. Externalization of borders is not limited to mobility (suffice to think to practices of anti-terrorism) but occurs particularly in the case of migration policies.. From the perspective of destination countries, practices of externalisation are aimed at promoting, supporting, delegating, imposing, or directly carrying out activities related to border management and regulation of migration outside their territories, whether in migrants' countries of origin, transit or international waters (Cuttitta 2020). These practices, traditionally directed at preventing the arrival of irregular migrants, are increasingly aimed also at finding ways to check, filter and select migrants outside of a given territory.

Externalization in the area of migration is part of a broader introduction of migration in the foreign policy agenda of the EU. The premises of this were sown already in the 1990s with EU enlargement and then the Barcelona Process (1995-2001) and eventually the Tampere European Council (1999) and the Amsterdam Treaty (1999) - that created stronger external relations in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (Ceccorulli and Fassi 2021; Collyer 2020). However, the development of a real external migration strategy accelerated in response to external challenges (Ceccorulli and Fassi 2021). This was the case of the Global Approach to Migration (2005), formulated after the 2004 crisis at the border between Morocco and Spain (in the exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla), as well as the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (2011) that followed the Arab springs. The events of the summer of 2015, however, firmly placed migration onto the EU's foreign policy agenda (European Commission 2015; European Commission and High Representative 2017b). In response to the crisis,

the EU strengthened or deployed new civilian and military missions - hence signalling the salience of the issue for the EU and the securitization of migration in the EU space - and accelerated the process of externalization of migration and border control. Initiatives aimed at stopping migrants short of the EU border – although already in place (Boswell 2003) - multiplied and became more visible. New multi-lateral and bi-lateral agreements on border management were signed between the EU, its Member States, and its neighbours and neighbours-of-neighbours, from Central Asia (e.g., Afghanistan) to sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Niger, Mali). In the process, border functions have been delocalized and responsibilities for border control (partially) delegated, through the exercise of the uneven power the EU has with its neighbours. The notorious EU-Turkey Statement of 2016 or the EU's support of the Italy-Libya agreement of 2017 de facto caused migrants to encounter the EU border in Turkey and Libya, or in the Mediterranean Sea. Operation Sophia, an anti-smuggling operation in the Mediterranean Sea that eventually helped train the Libyan Coast Guard, contributed to creating a functional border in the Mediterranean Sea.

The externalization of borders by the EU is frequently undertaken by 'breaking the legal link but not the law' (Müller and Slominski 2020). In other words, violations of the law that can (and in fact do) derive from these agreements are not formally attributable to the EU in legal terms, although they can be traced to the EU in ethical and political terms (Fassi, Ceccorulli and Lucarelli 2021). There are several types of measures undertaken to avoid full legal responsibility ranging from the adoption of semi-formal pathways to partnerships with third countries (as in the case of the EU-Turkey Statement and the Joint Way Forward with Afghanistan signed as declarations, hence bypassing the European Parliament), to support provided for an agreement signed by one Member State (as in the case of the agreement with Libya, formally signed by Italy, but in fact supported by the EU), to several forms of delegation of responsibility to third parties. Thus the legal provisions valid for the EU's geographical borders do not apply to the externalized borders and the EU cannot be claimed to be legally responsible for violations of EU law that occur. Such serious legal implications of border externalization occur both on land and at sea and cover wide areas that are directly or indirectly affected by the EU's (and Member States') externalization practices, from the Mediterranean Sea (Müller and Slominski 2020) to Turkey (Kaya 2021; Lehner 2019), the Sahel (Bøås 2021; Raineri and Strazzari 2019) and the Balkan route (Bobić and Šantic 2020), from Afghanistan (Dimitriadi 2021) to Libya (Ceccorulli and Varvelli 2021). Distance further contributes to the dispersion of legal duties by 'blurring the lines of causation and making attribution of wrongful conduct a difficult task' (Moreno-Lax and Lemberg-Pedersen 2019, 6).

Moreover, the complex network of actors involved (from local stakeholders to international organizations, and states of the region and beyond) make it even more difficult to identify legal

responsibilities and spot the formation of 'deterritorialized zones of lawlessness at border crossings, airports and maritime ports and encourage the excision of territories as well the building of outsourced camps' (Benhabib 2020). Furthermore, externalization disempowers migrants and forces them to choose more dangerous routes, while on the contrary empowering local actors tasked to perform border control. The implications of the latter empowerment, frequently in countries with poor democratic checks, has a negative effect on faith in democracy and human rights in these countries, besides that in the credibility of the EU with regard to the same.

Eventually, once the externalization of hard bordering is implemented and has become the rule, alternative practices of external soft bordering (legal channel of migrations) are strongly limited. Eventually, externalization produces what has been labelled 'border-induced displacement' (Lemberg-Pedersen 2012; Moreno-Lax and Lemberg-Pedersen 2019), that is, 'a second-order type of (*re*-)displacement, produced precisely via (the violence implicated in) border control' (Moreno-Lax and Lemberg-Pedersen 2019, 7). Indeed, the introduction of border controls in third countries produces forms of 'engineered regionalism' (Gibney 2007) leading to the displacement of migrants in areas close to their country of origin (according to the 'safe third country' rule). Hence, in the case of externalization, 'border-induced displacement is […] imposed upon already-displaced persons by non-European actors implementing the EU's pre-emptive control agenda' (Moreno-Lax and Lemberg-Pedersen 2019, 7). These practices, enhanced by the frequent militarization of external borders (Bence 2018), have contributed to processes of criminalization of human mobility in areas of the world in which the latter was a common practice (Cassarino 2018).

Frequently legitimated as ways to avoid migrants' exploitation by smugglers, several of the policies of border externalization have in fact worsened migrants' living conditions and reproduced long term power relations (by the EU vis-à-vis third countries and migrants ; by their countries' government and their constituencies). Moreover, the externalization of border control introduces a significant shift in terms of the understanding of borders as lines delineating spheres of rights. It also introduces grey zones of de-responsibility of main agents and empowerment of delegated ones, while disempowering migrants, regardless of the reason that pushed them to migrate.

3. Migration, Covid-19, and the internal re-bordering of Europe

While we were writing this article, long queues formed along the Brenner tollway, as the border crossing between Italy and Austria was limited to 'essential' travel and Austria introduced the requirement to obtain pre-travel clearance and the need to show a negative COVID test at the border (Austria Travel Portal 2021). In order to avoid uncontrolled traffic jams in the region, Italian

authorities set up a ‘filter’ in Verona, more than 200 km south of the border, and a post for rapid testing near Vipiteno, around 20 km from the border (Ansa 2021). These were just the last of the many border closures and reintroduction of border checks activated within the EU since the coronavirus pandemic reached the continent. Since then, access has been tightened, mobility has been limited and border checks have become common across the EU, and only the extension of the vaccination campaign has led to the partial withdrawal of these measures (Unece 2021).

This flexible re-bordering of the EU is a process that predates the coronavirus, and that has found in the pandemic new legitimization (Carrera and Luck 2020). In fact, while the spread of the disease was the main justification for reintroducing border checks, several states in the Schengen area did not formally reintroduce border controls because of the pandemic, but reinforced controls already in place for reasons mainly related to migration, secondary movements and terrorism. Since the so-called migration crisis of 2015, in fact, several states (Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway) have found different motivations to legitimate the extension of border controls for years: the analysis of state notifications and the Commission documents addressing the introduction and prolongation of internal border controls show how the perceived crisis at the external borders of the EU was rapidly associated with ‘secondary movements’ as a problem inside the Schengen area, with various motivations spanning from terrorism to the capacity of national reception systems (Karamanidou and Kasparek 2020).

We argue that this bridge between two crises makes more productive to see the pandemic as another occasion to analyse forms of re-bordering that reveal changes affecting the Schengen area and border practices across Europe, rather than just as another ‘exceptional’ situation. In fact, Montaldo (2020, 528) observes that these initiatives appear more as ‘a surface-level reaction to much deeper political tensions’, than responses to specific issues, and this has led to ‘a temporary remedy to contingent critical situations to be used as an ordinary mechanism *de-facto* reshaping the Schengen system’. Indeed, the multiplication of border controls has prompted a renewed focus on common external borders and the need to reform the European asylum system (Ceccorulli 2019; Cassarino and Luisa 2020; Carrera and Luk 2020).

Derogations to the abolition of border controls, the subsequent temporary reintroduction at internal borders, are admitted by the Schengen Border Code (SBC) for various foreseeable cases (Art. 24) and cases requiring urgent action (Art. 25). Exceptional circumstances and ‘threats’ to public policy, internal security and public health, which include a ‘disease with epidemic potential’, justify the reintroduction of border controls for a limited period of time (Art. 29). The Schengen Code makes clear that the crossing of external borders by a large number of third nationals ‘should not, per se, be considered to be a threat to public policy or internal security’ (Art. 26). In fact, while border controls

have been temporarily reintroduced for several reasons in accordance with the code, including political and sports events, 'the legal difficulty of justifying the reintroduction of internal border controls under SBC Article 25 on the basis of the 'migratory crisis' has not dissuaded Schengen states from invoking the persistence of 'a serious threat to public policy'' related to migration (Carrera et. al. 2018, 5). The strategy adopted by different Member States has been that of basing 'their notifications on slightly different justifications, to further secure continuity of (temporary) reintroductions over the months and years' (Montaldo 2020, 528).

After 2015, a possibility that was envisaged as an exceptional measure and implemented only by singular states, as in the case of France at the border with Italy after the 'Arab springs', 'has come to be normalized […] as a mechanism for governing migratory movements within the Schengen area' (Grappi 2020, 166-167; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2020, 2).

With the coronavirus pandemic, the lack of a coordinated European effort to tackle the spread of the virus has taken this process a step further, and has revealed that internal borders may be reactivated selectively, hardening borders for some flows in order to maintain softer controls over others. The European Commission (2020) itself stepped in and released 'guidelines for border management' which provided instructions for safeguarding the delivery of 'goods and essential services', which includes the mobility of workers considered as essential or posted, through 'green lanes', while at the same time limiting mobility 'to protect health'.

Besides this selectivity, a study commissioned by the European Parliament on practices of re-bordering during the pandemic has observed a shift in the way borders are managed and used to serve different policy priorities (Carrera and Luck 2020). The study argues that from a logic of containment close to the abovementioned simplistic definition of 'hard' borders, borders become elements of a more nuanced 'surveyed mobility', where identity and health checks make extensive use of interoperable databases and electronic tools to implement both policing and surveillance of travellers. In many circumstances, increased entry requirements prior to travel (for example in the form of medical certificates or the same 2021 Covid Pass, introduced after the vaccination campaign as a way to overcome limitations to circulation) have substituted direct border controls, but - the study finds - in some cases the framing, criteria and methods used in the geographical application of these restrictions are diverse and go beyond official epidemiological grounds (Carrera and Luck 2020, 10).

We further note that SBC differentiates between 'checks within the territory' and 'border checks' (Art. 23). Both are police measures related to bordering, but while border checks are localized at the geographic border and in principle systematic, checks within the territory are targeted to specific groups or individuals. While this may seem to be a purely operational distinction, it is precisely in the 'grey zone' between the two functions of control (Brower 2015) that it is possible to

grasp the material dimension of bordering practices in Europe. The analysis of border controls and internal checks shows how borders may be selectively reactivated to tame and stop some forms of mobility and some subjects, such as migrants, while softening controls over other forms of mobility and subjects, such as services, essential workers and trade. While the difference between the facilitated passage of trade and communication through transnational infrastructure and the policing reserved to human mobility is clear, the case of so-called posted workers, whose mobility inside the EU is allowed not by the principle of free movement of workers, but by that of services, condenses the tension that criss-crosses this selectivity. This complex governing of mobility, we argue, is associated with another emerging logic of re-bordering, where migration policies encounter the practices and rationale of logistics.

4. The logistification of European borders

In reintroducing internal border checks in 2015, Germany referred to the necessity of 'streamlining the spontaneous inflow of migrants in accordance with its reception capacities' (cit. in Brower 2015). This language resonates with the way asylum procedures have been rethought in Europe since 2015. With the help of the consulting firm McKinsey, for example, the European Asylum Support Service (EASO) suggested new 'good practices' to Member States, including Germany and Greece, for processing arrivals and asylum requests in order to facilitate the asylum process and reduce slowdowns (Bershidsky 2015; Stanley-Becker 2017). Investigative journalists have found links between these 'good practices' and the rationale behind the EU-Turkey agreement, that included the goal of a streamlined end-to-end asylum process and the concept of maximized productivity in the processing of cases through segmentation into categories, performance management systems and the extensive use of data (Fotiadis 2017; Fotiadis and Stavinoha 2020).

We argue that this approach, rather than being a simple pragmatic solution to a situation of distress for the European asylum system, can be better understood as part of an emerging logic of bordering that we associate with logistification. This logic, which backs up our thesis on the functional and operational intertwining of hardening and softening practices of bordering, aims to regain control over migrants' movements, instead of simply reinforcing the so-called 'fortress Europe'. Ideally, this phantasy implies controlling migrant geographies with a sophisticated, state-validated infrastructure of migration. In practice, it implies the formation of spaces of containment and violent intervention in order to tame autonomous movements or disrupt migrants' own infrastructure of mobility. We use the lens of logistics to better grasp this shift.

The concept of logistification is used in the critical literature on migration as a descriptive tool and a critical viewpoint to grasp an epistemological change in the field of migration, including migration governance (Bojadžijev 2020). This translates into multiple schemes, for example circular and temporary migrant labour or quota systems, aimed at integrating as much as possible migration policies, the role of border practices and the functional needs of economic actors. As part of this process, the 'infrastructuring' of migration implies the creation of physical and organizational architectures 'that shape opportunities for, and sanction certain, movements' and 'have the power to steer mobilities and variably produce migrant categories that one often now takes for granted' (Lin et. al. 2017, 168). Infrastructuring thus implies various elements, from documentary systems to public and private agencies and physical structures of containment, linked together in order to produce routinized practices. Even if this literature does not focus specifically on state borders, it is evident to us that this process affects the physical and administrative role of territorial borders. In discussing how logistics challenges geopolitical forms organized by nation-states' territoriality, for example, Deborah Cowen observes a move away from territorial models of bordering around nation states, in favour of a new paradigm of securitized mobility along global supply chains and networks of infrastructure (Cowen 2014, 53-90). While territorial borders remain, they are increasingly embedded in the formation of wider transnational regimes of legitimate versus irregular mobility, and with the creation of differences and hierarchies of migrants' mobility.

Logistical rationale implies both tailored, *just-in-time* and *to-the-point* practices of mobility and optimized routines and protocols (Grappi 2016). Logics of standardization coexist with the fact that mobility is not governed by one single policy, but in multiplied and flexible ways where different degrees of mobility, immobility, immobilization and mobilization coexist. This attributes different meanings and functions to borders, as they become tools in this governance of mobility rather than just barriers to stem migration. In the case of labour migration, schemes of temporary and circular migration, association agreements and quota systems compose a set of policy instruments aimed at promoting regular migration to match the place and duration of stay with economic needs (Vankova 2020). The coronavirus pandemic has contrasted the relevance and acceptance of the temporary and seasonal migration of 'essential' workers with the limitations and closures imposed on unregulated labour mobility (Grappi 2021).

Responding to the contradiction between the persistent demand for mobility and growing pressure to control and limit mobility, the pandemic has reinvigorated the tendency 'to securitize [mobility] through detailed regulations and technologies, such as contact tracing apps, big data' and the move to 'delegate more power to transport companies and third-party intermediaries' (Xiang 2020). On the other hand, the search for optimized routines and protocols have affected the way the

EU has tried to reframe border posts as elements of a wider logistical assemblage to cope with migrants applying for asylum.

A way to analyse this shift is to look at practices enacted along the so-called 'Balkan Route' and the establishment of hotspots in different points of arrival for migrants in EU territory. Studies of the summer of 2015 have stressed how a 'corridor' composed of camps, processing facilities and lines of transport 'had been established across the Balkans, reaching from the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki to several regional distribution centres in Germany' (Kasparek 2016). As reported by Kasparek (2016), inside the corridor migrants were allowed to move, surpassing the limitations of European asylum procedures and migration laws. Albeit temporary, the formation of the corridor was an operational measure to convert the movement of people in the region into the 'gradual, controlled and orderly movement of persons', including in the EU, the Schengen area and neighbouring countries, aimed at channelling and sorting migrants along knowable routes (European Commission 2015). While this somehow softened regional borders for people included in the corridor, it hardened control over migrants' movements to the point that when migrants were asked why they didn't pursue alternative paths, they answered that 'if you leave the flow, you are lost' (Kasparek 2016). The corridor was dismantled after Germany and Austria decided to close their borders to asylum seekers, but its short life revealed an approach that can be employed in specific situations to regulate flows, rather than just stopping them.

In the establishment of hotspots, we see different practices that respond to a similar logistical rationale. In fact, rather than being a 'thing', the hotspot is an 'approach' of governance aimed at channelling 'exceptional migratory flows' along fast track asylum procedures or return operations to help frontline Member States fulfil their obligations under EU law (European Commission 2015). In practice, the implementation of this 'approach' consists of creating teams of EASO experts in screening, debriefing and fingerprinting and in setting up a network of facilities where these operations – identification, registration, assessment and redistribution – are carried out. It is useful to mention how a hotspot works: an ethnographic study on the Moria Hotspot in Greece shows that the structure functions 'by assembling all the entities involved *in one place* and by organizing very mundane practices such as filling out forms, taking fingerprints, signing and archiving paperwork and entering and copying datasets along […] *a chain*' (Pollozek and Passoth 2019, 15). The chain moves migrants, produces identities and data, sorts fates into distinct institutional channels and coordinates different national, European and nongovernmental agencies.

Besides this operational logistics in situ, hotspots produce digital identities and data for the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Visa Information System (VIS) and the European Dactyloscopy (Eurodac) through identification, interviews and fingerprinting. These data can then be

used by different agencies – local, national and European – thus moving border practices away from the geographical border. This serves not only to facilitate re-identification and limit secondary movements, but also to track migrants' movements and create maps for risk analysis in order to predict incoming movements or direct the deployment of border teams in specific places (Pollozek and Passoth 2019; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2020).

By treating migrants as objects of governance instead of subjects, these practices conflate different dimensions of the border, spreading its 'hard' functions far from the border itself. While the functional logic of hotspots requires a high level of coordination and cooperation among different institutions and actors, which is difficult to achieve in and of itself, it also implies forced cooperation on the part of migrants, for example by giving exact information or keeping fingerprints readable. These processes that we have associated with logistification thus create the conditions for the tensions and fault lines we have seen emerging at almost every point of the European reception systems in the past years. At the same time, they contribute to the fact that EU borders cannot be considered as simple geographical matters, insofar as they are spaces of 'dual territoriality', fully inside the EU as far as police control is concerned but legally 'less… territorial' as far as third country nationals' entitlement to rights (Cassarino and Luisa 2020).

Conclusions

A significant transformation of borders as boundaries of territoriality, sovereignty and rights is taking place worldwide and particularly in Europe. In the EU we are not only witnessing the partial but steady deconstruction of the freedom of movement allowed and symbolized by the Schengen agreement, but a more comprehensive transformation of the meaning and practices of borders within, around and outside the EU. Such a transformation goes beyond the mere distinction between hard and soft borders, as some apparently soft measures can in fact have the function of hard borders and vice versa. Moreover, bordering in and by the EU/rope takes several forms of which we have analysed here three particularly important ones: externalization, internal re-bordering and logistification. Although partially overlapping, these three practices should be analysed separately as they point to a specific dimension of bordering: one aimed at delegating burdens and responsibilities of border control outside the EU; one aiming at introducing a flexible selectivity in the mobility between Member States, de facto having as a consequence the deconstruction the EU as an area of free movement; and one aimed at applying the organising logic of logistics to governing migration. The result is a transformed landscape of sovereignty and rights in which the simplistic-yet-understandable

Westphalian borders that overlap with the contours of spheres of rights, are replaced by a magmatic reality in which in order to manage mobility the reach of bordering practices and the implementation of border functions extends well beyond the border itself and migrants are increasingly considered as mere objects of governance.

Far from being the simple result of a response to an emergency situation, the reorganization of borders in/by Europe seems to be a longer-term process which profits from crisis situations to normalize what has been achieved in the previous crisis, to proceed in the following one without a proper understanding of the consequences in terms of breaches of fundamental rights. Covid-19 has thus enhanced trends already visible in the 2015/6 migrant crisis.

Moreover, the process, far from being neutral with respect to power relations, relies on the unbalanced power of the agents and subjects involved in the process of migration – the EU, its Member States, third countries, criminal groups, employers, IOs, NGOs and the migrants – reinforcing their relative powerful/weak positions. Finally, we can conclude that the processes shed a gloomy light on an ideal European project that was originally centred around ever more integrated European societies, the reluctance to use force, support for democratic forces in third countries and respect for human rights. The processes of re-bordering described in this article by focussing on what borders *do*, rather than on what they *are*, reveal the weakness of such a project vis-à-vis the tensions surrounding mobility.

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[i] On the concept of collective securitization see Sperling and Webber 2019; Lucarelli 2019. On the EU collective securitization of Schengen, see Ceccorulli 2019; on the spiraling of securitization of migration in Europe, among many publications, see Panebianco 2021.