



Màster en Relacions Internacionals Seguretat i Desenvolupament (MURISD)

The Securitization of Islamic State Foreign Fighters during 2014-2018 and its implications for the counter-terrorist strategy of the European Union

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ABSTRACT: Under the new dawn following the Islamic State's proclamation of the Caliphate in Mosul, northern Iraq, hundreds of Europeans saw in this event a call to join the ranks of the Islamic State and fight for the jihad. Between 2014 and 2018, the phenomenon of European foreign fighters reached its maximum level, with large flows of travellers embarking on their journey to Syria and Iraq. It is between these years that the European Union began to consider this phenomenon as a threat to its security. This research examines how the phenomenon of European Islamic State foreign fighters has been securitised and whether this process has been successful for the European Union's counterterrorism strategy. To meet the research objective, the three phases of the securitization process proposed by the Copenhagen School have been analysed, focusing on the construction of the threat from the speech acts of the legitimate authorities, the specific measures to combat the threat and the determination of their success based on the analysis of the European opinion through the Eurobarometer. This study concludes by providing new insights into the European Union's counter-terrorism strategy in relation to the phenomenon of foreign fighters.

KEYWORDS: Foreign fighters, Securitization process, Islamic State, European Union, Jihad, Eurobarometer, Counterterrorism.

**MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN RELACIONES
INTERNACIONALES, SEGURIDAD Y DESARROLLO**

**The Securitization of Islamic State Foreign Fighters during
2014-2018 and its implications for the counter-terrorist
strategy of the European Union**

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Declaro, con mi firma al pie, que el presente trabajo es original y que no contiene plagios o usos indebidos de otras fuentes y acepto las consecuencias que podría tener contravenir el presente compromiso.

This study would not have been possible without the infinite help and trust of my director, Dr. Alessandro Demurtas, who has always shown me his infinite kindness and expertise in this subject.

Nor would it have been possible without my parents, who have given me everything for me to pursue my dreams.

And without Carles, to whom I have owed all my joys for the last 4 years.

ABSTRACT

Under the new dawn following the Islamic State's proclamation of the Caliphate in Mosul, northern Iraq, hundreds of Europeans saw in this event a call to join the ranks of the Islamic State and fight for the *jihad*. Between 2014 and 2018, the phenomenon of European foreign fighters reached its maximum level, with large flows of travellers embarking on their journey to Syria and Iraq. It is between these years that the European Union began to consider this phenomenon as a threat to its security. This research examines how the phenomenon of European Islamic State foreign fighters has been securitised and whether this process has been successful for the European Union's counterterrorism strategy. To meet the research objective, the three phases of the securitization process proposed by the Copenhagen School have been analysed, focusing on the construction of the threat from the speech acts of the legitimate authorities, the specific measures to combat the threat and the determination of their success based on the analysis of the European opinion through the Eurobarometer. This study concludes by providing new insights into the European Union's counter-terrorism strategy in relation to the phenomenon of foreign fighters.

Key words: foreign fighters, securitization process, Islamic State, European Union, *jihad*, Eurobarometer, counterterrorism.

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PART I: STATUS OF THE ISSUE

1.1. Introduction

In the post-Cold War international security context, the importance of the role on non-state actors has increased year by year, not only as objects to be protected, but also as actors providing (in)security. The attacks on 11 September 2001 raised jihadist terrorism as one of the threats that States had to deal with.

Since 2014, the international terrorist phenomenon has re-emerged as a major concern for the international community, especially since the proclamation of the *Caliphate* in Mosul by the then leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. Since that year, a vast majority of attacks in various regions of the world have been perpetrated by Islamic State¹. The methods employed by terrorist organisations have evolved, as have their members. The case of ISIL is the clearest example: the estimated number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq between 2014 and 2015 ranged from 27.000 to 30.000, from as many as 86 countries (Bawkowski and Puccio, 2016).

The adoption by some countries, such as France or Spain, of a level 5 terrorist alert and the inclusion of jihadism on political agendas only underscores the importance of the phenomenon. The influx of foreign fighters of European origin who travelled between 2014 and 2018 to territories where IS was present has led to a necessary change in the EU's counter-terrorism strategy. Consequently, the construction of EU discourse around the foreign fighters has been securitised.

The aim of this research is to study how the phenomenon of foreign fighters has been securitised by the European Union and the authorities of the Member States, and to see what implications it has had on the EU's counter-terrorism strategy since 2014. To conduct this study, there are two research questions that underpin all the work. On the one hand, the first research question to be answered is: How have the European Union and the authorities of the Member States securitised the phenomenon of ISIS foreign fighters? The second question contains several sub-questions necessary to complete the research: What implications does the securitization of the foreign fighter phenomenon

¹In this research we will refer to the terrorist group ISIS in its different names and acronyms: Islamic State, Daesh, Da'esh, ISIS, ISIL, IS.

have for the EU's counter-terrorism strategy? What policy responses have been given? Have they been effective? To meet the objectives, the analysis is divided into seven different sections: the first is a brief overview of the recent history of Da'esh and the dimensions of foreign fighters' phenomenon in recent times. The second section is dedicated to the theoretical framework on which we will base our research: a literature review of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory. In the third section, and directly related to the theoretical framework, we will set out the hypotheses of the study. The fourth section aims to shed light on the phenomenon of ISIS foreign fighters with a review of their evolution through data collected from EU sources. Therefore, the fifth section explains through the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization how the phenomenon has been securitised by the European Union and Member State authorities. On one hand, the sixth section will analyse the EU's counter-terrorism strategy and how the phenomenon has transformed it and to what extent the European population has accepted this process of securitization to answer the second part of the research. On other hand and to conclude with the research approach, the seventh part is exclusively dedicated to the conclusions; the fruit of the combination of the previous sections and the answers to the research questions through the deconstruction of the different texts studied, statements, data analysis and bibliography used.

1.2. Historical context: the rise of Islamic State and the phenomenon of foreign fighters

ISIS is a non-state actor within the category of terrorist group. Classifying an actor as a terrorist is a fact that carries with it a significant theoretical burden, since its motivations are political (Niño, 2018). They define themselves as a military organisation under the umbrella of Wahhabi fundamentalism (Macris, 2016).

While we will not delve into the historical roots of ISIS, its evolution since 2006 deserves special mention. The history of Daesh must be understood in conjunction with Al-Qaeda. It began with the creation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) by Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. For three years, AQI operated on behalf of Al-Qaeda, until 2006 when they announced the creation of the Islamic State, a decision not consulted with the central leadership. It was not until the period between 2011 and 2014 that they began to regain fighters and strength on the

ground. The new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was presented at the Grand Mosque in Mosul as the new Caliph (Farré, 2017, p. 170-175).

One characteristic that distinguishes ISIS from other jihadist groups and deserves special attention for the phenomenon of foreign fighters is the internationalisation. ISIS has undergone an evolution since the proclamation of the Caliphate in 2014 and has had to develop the capacity to exploit its network of contacts. The proclamation forced them to become a more internationalised movement as, for example, Al-Qaeda was in its most active years.

As a result, the phenomenon of foreign fighters began to emerge. However, foreign fighters are not new, although at the beginning of the 21st century they were seen as an isolated phenomenon (Bakker and Singleton, 2016). The academic literature on foreign fighters remains rather limited, as it is difficult to establish the boundaries of their actions since they often move between local insurgency and international terrorism (Hegghammer, 2010 as cited in Ahmed and Pisoiu, 2014). Hegghammer expands on the definition by characterising foreign fighters as “an agent who 1) has joined, and operates within the confines of an insurgency, 2) lacks a citizenship of the conflict state or kinship, 3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization and 4) is unpaid” (Hegghammer, 2010). This limits the definition and excludes paid mercenaries and soldiers, as well as exiled citizens (Ahmed and Pisoiu, 2014). The present research will focus on the definition given by Hegghammer, bearing in mind that although the Islamic State has *the structures of an army*, it is not an official army.

PART II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Securitization theory: a proposal from the Copenhagen School

The reconfiguration of the international security scenario after 1989 highlighted the need to approach emerging new phenomena from non-traditional perspectives. In 1985, a Centre for Peace and Conflict Research was established in Copenhagen; one of its research projects succeeded in establishing a rich body of work with a sufficient degree of coherence and continuity to warrant the label “School” (McSweeney, 1996 as cited in Huysmans, 1998). From the Copenhagen School, in this research, we will focus on the

proposal of the securitization theory presented by Buzan, Wæver and Wilde in their work: *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Buzan et al., 1998).

To understand the Copenhagen School's theory of securitization, the first step is to approach their idea of security. The defining feature of the Copenhagen School approach to security is the fact that it proposes to study security practices by drawing on speech act philosophy, assuming that the articulation of security is a crucial form of security action. It is this articulation that has the potential to structure the social practices that follow and entails the claim that something is held to pose a threat to a valued referent object that is so existential that it is legitimate to move the issue beyond the established games of normal politics to deal with it by exceptional (Stritzel, 2007). This deepening of the definition of security implies the assumption that the state, although crucially important, is no longer the only subject of reference (Demurtas, 2019). Furthermore, the main objective of securitization theory is to understand how an issue that could, in principle, be dealt with in a "normal" way through ordinary public policies, acquires a different nature as a result of discourses by legitimate authorities and becomes: 1) a security issue and of special relevance as it becomes a top priority and 2) an existential threat to the security of a referent object that needs to be dealt with through extraordinary channels.

According to the Copenhagen School, the securitization process consists of three distinct phases:

- 1) In the first phase, there is a speech act by a legitimate authority (considered legitimate by public opinion), in which it identifies an existential threat to the security of a referent object. In this study, the legitimate authority is the European Union and the authorities of the Member States where the foreign fighters of the ISIS are identified as an existential threat to the referent object: European citizens and their values, the EU's own security and its territorial sovereignty.
- 2) In the second phase of the process, the legitimate authority decides to take emergency measures to combat the threat. In the case of this research, emergency measures are decisions, directives, and other types of legislative measures that do not pertain to ordinary public policy.

- 3) In the third and final phase, through the analysis of opinion polls, it will be possible to determine whether public opinion has accepted the discourse and measures conducted by the legitimate authorities. If this is the case, the securitization process can be considered successful. In our case study, we will analyse Eurobarometer opinion polls related to jihadist terrorism from 2014 to 2018, especially those related to threat perception.

On the other hand, the different actors involved in the securitization process have a crucial role to play in these three phrases:

- a) Referent object: subject or object whose survival is under real or perceived threat. In this study, the European citizens, their values and the EU's own security and its territorial sovereignty.
- b) Securitizing actor: subject that formulates the discourse on security and must be considered legitimate by the public. In this research, the European Union, and authorities of Member States between 2014 and 2018.
- c) Functional actor: subject capable of influencing the dynamics and decision-making process of a security actor. In this case, the NATO.
- d) Agent provocateur: subject with an interest in exacerbating a threat in the perception of public opinion. In this case of study, we will consider some European political leaders such as the Hungarian Prime Minister: Viktor Orbán.

2.2. Hypothesis

In the present work, two variables are considered. One of a dependent nature and the other of independent nature. The dependent variable is the European counter-terrorist legislation and its implementation and results between 2014-2018. The independent

variable refers to the number of European people who have enlisted as a foreign fighter in Daesh.

Although the two main hypotheses are H1 and H2, it has been considered convenient to incorporate two sub-hypotheses for each one as we understand the securitization process as a multidimensional process where different variables must be considered:

H1. The European Union and Member State authorities successfully securitised foreign fighters' phenomenon in the eyes of European public opinion as measured by Eurobarometer.

H1.1. Securitization is a multidimensional as the speech acts cover different dimensions: political, military, economic and societal.

H1.2. The object of reference under real or perceived threat are European citizenship, European values, territorial sovereignty, and EU security.

H2. Securitization has implications for the European counter-terrorism strategy in terms of institutions and rules (new specific rules) and resources employed (more financial funding and experts).

H2.1. From the institutional policy point of view, a preventive (not repressive) and proactive (through seeking to eliminate the root causes of terrorism) multilateral and multi-level approach is adopted.

H2.2. In the resources employed, a combined approach is taken of both military and police means for prevention (increased security at airports, registration of travellers) and civilian means (economic and social) for pro-action (preventing radicalisation in the suburbs of European cities and in prisons).

PART III: ANALYSIS

3.1. Data and evolution of the phenomenon of Islamic State foreign fighters

The internationalisation of the Syrian civil conflict since 2011 and the emergence of the role of non-state actors such as ISIS led to a resurgence of the phenomenon of foreign fighters. By far the majority were fighting as part of Islamic State and the United Nations

had assessed that there were 15.000-20.000 foreign fighters, but the real figure could be twice as high (Greenwood, 2017).

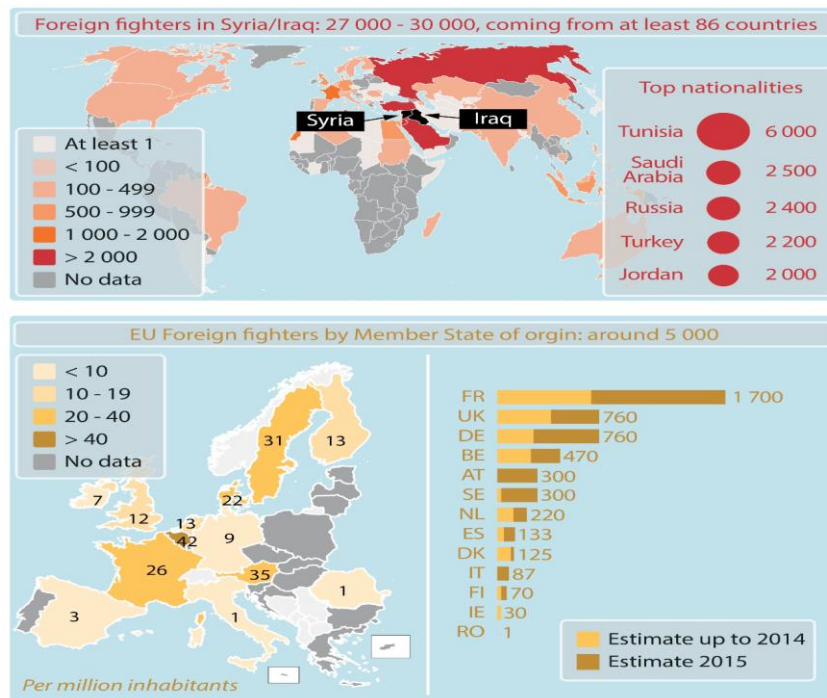
The European Parliament in the framework of the European response to terrorism produced a document entitled "[Foreign Fighters - Member State responses and EU action](#)". The paper uses the same definition of foreign fighter as this research: “individuals who join insurgencies abroad and whose primary motivation is ideological or religious rather than financial” (Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, 2014 as cited in Bawkowski and Puccio, 2016). One of the points in the report that we must consider is that the understanding of the phenomenon of foreign fighters and its evolution is not a new issue. It is estimated that from 1980 to mid-2010 between 10.000 and 30.000 foreign fighters took part in armed conflicts in the Muslim world (Hegghammer, 2010 as cited in Bawkowski and Puccio, 2016). However, since the 2010s, and especially since the Arab Springs and the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the phenomenon has been increasing exponentially. The exact number of foreign fighters is quite difficult to establish but the Soufan Center² estimated that in 2015 the overall number of foreign combatants in the Levant was between 27.000 and 30.000. An estimated 5.000 fighters were from the EU and most of them come from just four countries: France, the UK, Germany, and Belgium (Bawkowski and Puccio, 2016).

This first figure, which can be found on the following page, is the one used by the European Union in its official documents to establish a numerical approximation of the phenomenon of foreign fighters between 2014 and 2015.

² A New York-based security intelligence consultancy

Figure 1

Estimated number of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq by country of origin (2015)



Source: The Soufan Group (2015) extracted from Bawkowski, P. and Puccio, L. (2016). Foreign Fighters - Member State Responses and EU action (report number: 579.080). European Parliament Research Service. Members' Research Service.

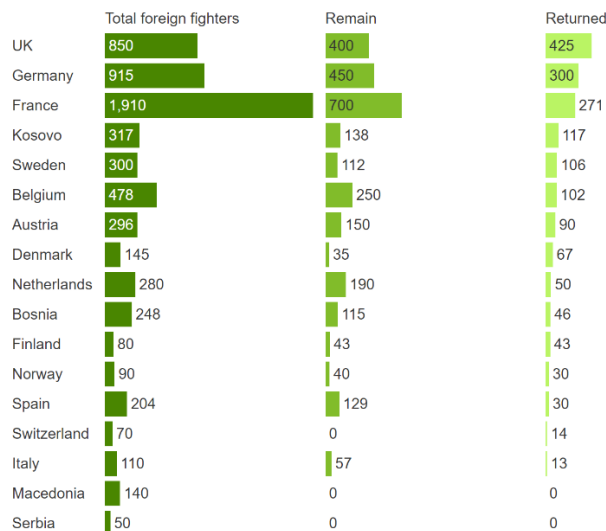
From this figure we highlight especially the bottom part, where France, between 2014 and 2015, was in the lead with up to 1.700 fighters, followed by the UK and Germany with 760. On top of this, it is difficult to establish a precise number of foreign fighters in ISIS since 2016 for several reasons: more difficulties for converts to travel to areas such as Syria and Iraq, deaths in combat, arrests and even the disinformation used by the Islamic State itself.

Figure 2

ISIS foreign fighters who travelled to Iraq / Syria

ISIS' foreign fighters who travelled to Iraq/Siria from Europe

Data from 2016-17 by country



Source: The Soufan Center • Created with Datawrapper

Source: The Soufan Center, 2017 extracted from The Soufan Center (2017). Beyond the Caliphate; Foreign fighters and the threat of returnees.

In this more detailed graph, we continue to observe that between 2016 and 2017 the trend in terms of nationalities remains the same: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium continue to be the countries of origin of most foreign fighters in ISIS. Another interesting point of the figure is that it also shows the fighters who remain in the Middle East. Along the same lines, the U.S intelligence assessments suggested that the number of foreign fighters crossing the border from Turkey fell from 2.000 each month to about 50 in September 2016 (Witte, 2016 as cited in Reed et al., 2017). Likewise, governments in France, Germany, Belgium, and the UK have reported fewer foreign fighters leaving their territories compared to previous years (Mehra, 2016 as cited in Reed et al., 2017).

3.2. The securitization of the phenomenon

This section is exclusively focused on the first phase of the securitization process. In order to carry out this part, it has been necessary to collect different speech acts. In addition, an exhaustive sifting of twenty speeches has been made, discarding six and focusing on the fourteen speech acts that can be read in this part. This assessment is based on a series of characteristics and variables that have been established as necessary to successfully analyse the first part of the securitization process.

The variables that have been considered for discarding or including the discourses are:

- 1) Their appropriateness over time: if speech acts that have taken place between 2014 and 2018, especially in the years where the sense of threat was most latent (2014-2016).
- 2) The persons carrying out the speech acts: whether they are considered as legitimate authorities both in the EU and in the Member States. And, in the case of the Member State authorities, if they are authorities of countries that have either suffered terrorist acts perpetrated by Islamic State foreign fighters on their territory or have killed their citizens outside their borders (France, Belgium, UK, Germany, and Spain).
- 3) The acts referred to in the speech acts: it is considered that due to the characteristics of the investigation it is necessary to limit the speech acts to acts that refer to either: a) direct threats from ISIS foreign fighters to the object of reference or b) terrorist acts perpetrated on European territory.

The starting point we will take as a reference is late 2013 and early 2014 when the Syrian war began to take on an international dimension. The possibility of external military intervention shaped both opposition and regime strategies and the West, including European countries such as France who become involved in Syria on a scale much short of over military intervention (Hinnebusch and Saouli, 2019). There are also several developments in which the EU began to identify the Islamic State as an existential threat. These are events that, although they occurred far from European borders, have great symbolism associated with them. Thus, in July 2014 the speech titled *A message to the*

Mujahidin and the Muslim Ummah in the Month of Ramadan by the then leader: “This is my advice to you [to all the Muslim community]. If you hold it, you will conquer Rome and own the world, if Allah wills.” In this way, al-Adnani, one of the organisation's most important propagandists, stated in speech of September 2014, called *Indeed your Lord is Ever Watchful*: “We will conquer your Rome and break your crosses.” (Marone and Olimpio, 2023). Another event was the kidnapping and beheading off the coast of Libya of 21 Egyptian Coptic workers, where their executioners videotaped themselves killing them and claiming once again that they will conquer Rome, identifying Rome as the banner of the West and Christianity.

MURDER OF A BRITISH CITIZEN BY A FOREIGN FIGHTER IN THE SYRIAN DESERT, 14 SEPTEMBER 2014

The first statement we will consider is that of the British Prime Minister during that period, David Cameron. The Prime Minister's speech act came just hours after news broke of the murder of David Haines, a British aid worker, killed by a British ISIS foreign fighter. In the video of David Haines' execution, Islamic State forced him to claim that his death was the sole responsibility of David Cameron and that he was paying for the sins of Britain's policies in the Middle East (Chappell, 2014).

Speech act of the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, 14 September 2014

“The fact that an aid worker was taken, held, and brutally murdered sums up what this organization stands for. They are not Muslims, they are *monsters*. This act is an act of pure *evil*” (Cameron, 2014 on Chappell 2014).

This speech given a few hours after the killing allows us to observe the starting point of the securitization process of the foreign fighter phenomenon. On the one hand, Cameron emphasises the purposes of the Islamic State: to threaten people's lives, to kill them and to perpetrate massacres. This statement is a declaration of intentions: an existential threat to security and human safety is identified. Even if these events took place thousands of kilometres away from European borders, the fact that the nationality of the murdered person is European shows that the object of reference in this case is European citizens themselves. David Cameron, in this case, takes the role of securitising actor as he

formulates the security discourse on the phenomenon: he identifies it as an existential threat to the referent object (in this case, to European citizens and their values, exposed through the figure of David Haines); to all this, we can add that Cameron is an actor considered legitimate by the citizenry.

If we go on to analyse the speech act, without a doubt, the most outstanding statement is: "They are not Muslims, they are monsters. This is an act of pure evil." This adjectivisation of foreign fighters as monsters highlights one fact: they are identified as the enemy. Van Dijk emphasises that after a terrorist act [be it an attack or a murder, as in this case] a dichotomy tends to be established in the narrative between an "us" and a "them" (Van Dijk, 2018). Carl Schmitt mentions this typology of dichotomous criteria in his book *The Concept of the Political* (1932) and defines it as friend-enemy. Likewise, this friend-enemy is an expression of the existing need for differentiation in the face of the existing threat and entails an affirmation of ourselves against the other [them] (Parra, 2011).

FIRST DIRECT ISLAMIC STATE THREATS TO FRANCE. 22 SEPTEMBER 2014

In the context of the Syrian War, the President Barack Obama expressed the desire to create an international coalition to fight jihadism; with the support of the United Nations, the Combined Joint Task Force (CFTJ - OIR) was created, made up of thirty countries including NATO countries such as the USA, Germany, and France.

With the inclusion of France in the coalition, the Islamic State saw a potential enemy for two basic reasons: first, it is the European country with the highest percentage of Muslim population. And secondly, it led the ranking of European foreign fighters in terms of nationality. These two facts allowed them to create an enemy that fit their discourse of *holy war*: foreign fighters must return to their country of origin to attack those who threaten the existence of the Caliphate and live in lands where the law of non-Muslims prevails³. In this context, the then spokesman for Daesh, Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, called on foreign fighters trained in their camps that they should return to commit these

³ In the Islamic tradition these lands are referred to as *Dar al kufr*. For more information: <https://fitrahtawheed.com/dar-al-kufr>

acts to attack citizens - without distinction - of countries such as France, which he described as malevolent.

Speech act of the French Interior Minister, Bernard Cazaneuve, 22 September 2014

“France is not afraid. This is not the first time France has been threatened by terrorist groups who attack the values of *tolerance, respect for human rights and democracy*, which France has upheld through its secular history. Even if there is no such thing as zero risk, today we are taking 100 percent precautions. The security forces are fully mobilised to deal with any threat at home” (Cazaneuve, 2014 on Local, 22 September 2014).

This speech goes a little further than David Cameron's and explicitly claims that Islamic State and its fighters want to attack French [and European] values such as tolerance, respect for human rights and democracy. Again, we note that the reference object under threat is again European security. Another point to note is that although these threats have come from abroad, there is no zero-security risk, and that they are taking the maximum possible precautions with the security forces fully mobilised to deal with any threats at home. This statement is interesting for the hypotheses put forward in this research: in the first instance, there is a securitization of the phenomenon where the object of reference is European citizens, their values, the security of Member States and consequently of the Union and territorial sovereignty. Moreover, securitization is a multidimensional process, both military and societal.

CONFERENCE AND MEETING AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. 23 OCTOBER 2014 – 3 NOVEMBER 2014

In the framework of the conference "Foreign fighters in the Islamic Caliphate: what can the EU do?" held at the Royal Institute for International Relations, Gilles de Kerchove⁴ explained the situation of the threat of European foreign fighters in Da'esh on account of the threats they themselves had made public against the EU.

⁴ EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator until 2021 when Ilkka Salmi was appointed to the mandate.

Speech act Gilles de Kerchove, 23 October 2014

“Approximate figure of 3.000 foreign fighters have joined the Islamic Caliphate. The EU has taken several actions to confront the *threat represented by (returning) foreign fighters*. The European Union is concerned about the implications of certain preventive measures, we need a full compliance with human rights legislation when fighting ISIS and tackling the foreign fighter’s phenomenon” (European Commission, 2014).

Three factors stand out from this statement. Firstly, the "who": Gilles de Kerchove, an actor who must also be considered in the categorisation of securitizing actor since he formulates the discourse on the terrorist threat and is considered legitimate by the public because of his position. Secondly, the "where": a conference specifically dedicated to the phenomenon of foreign fighters and thirdly and directly related to the two previous factors; the terms used by Kerchove: "[...] to confront the threat represented by (returning) foreign fighters” assuming, on the one hand, what we have been saying previously: clear identification of the threat and, on the other, the certainty that foreign fighters do not only travel to Syria and Iraq to fight in the war but also to train, make contact with the Caliphate and return to their European countries of origin to carry out attacks, even more radicalised. It is for this reason that the approach to the phenomenon must be preventive, proactive, and multilateral, since, as Kerchove himself points out, the European authorities are concerned about the implications of certain measures assumed by the Member States.

ATTACKS IN PARIS ON 13 NOVEMBER 2015

The analysis of the securitization process of the foreign fighter phenomenon cannot be understood without the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015. Therefore, on November 13, 2015, at 9.20 p-m, a man detonated a suicide vest at the *Stade de France*. This detonation was followed by a shooting by three armed gunmen at restaurants and bars in Paris 11th District, and a hostage event at the Bataclan Concert Hall. The assailants included seven individuals from France and Belgium who travelled previously to Syria to fight for ISIS turning this attack into a terrorist act perpetrated by returned foreign fighters (Cragin, 2017).

Figure 3 shows the citizenship and date of travel to Syria of the attackers.

Figure 3

Core operatives in the Paris Attacks

	Date of Departure for Syria	Citizenship	Family Origin	Attack Site in Paris
Abdelhamid Abaaoud	March 2013	Belgium	Morocco	Restaurants in 11 th District
Ibrahim Abdeslam	January 2013	France	Morocco	Restaurants in 11 th District
Chakib Akrouh	January 2015	Belgium	Morocco	Restaurants in 11 th District
Bilal Hadfi	October 2015	France	Morocco	Stade de France
Ukashah al-Iraqi	N/A	Iraq	Iraq	Stade de France
Ali al-Iraqi	N/A	Iraq	Iraq	Stade de France
Sami Amimour	September 2013	France	Algeria	Bataclan Concert Hall
Omar Ismael Mostefai	September 2013	France	Algeria	Bataclan Concert Hall
Foued Mohammed Aggad	December 2013	France	Morocco	Bataclan Concert Hall

Source: Cragin, R. K. (2017). The November 2015 Paris attacks: the impact of foreign fighter returnees. *Orbis*, 61(2), 212-226.

SPEECH ACTS

European Commission, 14 November 2015

“The European Union is deeply shocked after the terrorist attacks in Paris. It is an *attack against us all*. We will face this threat together with all necessary means and ruthless determination. Its values of liberty, equality and fraternity inspired and inspire the European Union. [...] *Good is stronger than evil*. Everything that can be done at European level to make France safe will be done. We will do what is necessary to defeat extremism, terrorism, and hatred” (European Commission, 2015).

In this speech act we see how on the one hand they identify this attack as an act perpetrated not only against France but against Europe and all its values, and on the other hand, with the sentence: *good is stronger than evil* the European Commission again dichotomises the question.

François Hollande on the night of the attacks, 13 November 2015

“We have taken the decision to *mobilise all forces* to neutralise the terrorists and to guarantee the security [...]. The second decision which I have taken is to *close the borders*. We must make sure than no one can return to carry out such acts” (Hollande, 2015 on the Guardian, 2015).

This speech act is especially relevant because 1) emergency measures are taken because an existential threat to a referent object [French citizens, the values, security, and sovereignty of a European country] is identified and 2) it is assumed that the borders must be closed because the perpetrators have been foreign fighters.

François Hollande speech act on the French Parliament, 16 November 2015

“France is at *war*. They are an act of aggression against our country, against its values, against its young people, and against its way of life. They carried out by a jihadist army which is fighting us because France is a *country of freedom*, because we are the birthplace of human rights [...] It exists a national unity [...]. We are in a war against jihadist terrorism that threatens the entire world, not just France [...] The need to destroy Daesh concerns the whole international community. Meanwhile, France will step up its operations in Syria. Today we need more airstrikes It hurts to say it, but we know that these were *French people who killed other French people* on Friday” (Hollande, 2015).

Of all the speech acts analysed, François Hollande's speech in the French Parliament is probably the one that best illustrates how a process of securitization is carried out: France is at war against a threat [ISIS and its foreign fighters] who attack a referent object [French values such as freedom] and finally the focus is put on the attackers: it was French people who killed French people; the threat is not external but is trained outside European borders to attack on EU soil.

Martin Schulz on the behalf of European Parliament, 14 November 2015

“Yesterday, Paris was brutally attacked for the second time in less than a year. Terrorists wanted to *target the core of western civilisation, its values, and its people*. They wanted

to spread *terror*, fear, and divisions. However, Europe stands united in the fight against terrorism [...]. Our commitment to defend our values of freedom, equality, democracy, and the rule of law is as strong as ever” (Schulz, 2015 on European Parliament, 2015).

In this speech act, a legitimate authority of the EU institutions once again emphasises the importance of defending European values and its citizens as the object of reference under the threat of foreign fighters.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, 14 November 2015

“This attack on freedom is not only aimed against Paris. It’s aimed against us all. We know that our *free life* is stronger than terror” (Merkel, 2015 on Staff, 2015).

Once again, a legitimate authority such as the German Chancellor at the time, Angela Merkel, shows her country's solidarity and that this attack is not only against Paris or France, but against the whole of the European Union because of shared values.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General, 16 November 2015

“We stand in strong *solidarity* with the government and the people of France in their unwavering determination to deal with the terrorist threat. We are all more than ever determined to counter and *defeat the threat of terrorism and extremism*. Several Allies are already working with France on their ongoing operations and investigations in the wake of the attacks. Terrorism and extremism can never defeat democracy and our open societies.” (Stoltenberg, 2015 on NATO, 2015).

In this case, the speech is from the functional actor, who has the capacity to influence the dynamics of the security actor. We observe how Stoltenberg appeals to the unity of NATO allies to defeat the threat of terrorism and stresses that this threat cannot and should not mean the end of democracy in extremely free and open societies [such as the EU and its values].

These speech acts, once again, show us how our hypothesis (H.1.2) proves to be true: the object of reference under threat are European citizens, their values, EU security and territorial sovereignty. The fact that numerous authorities use words such as freedom, equality, fraternity, Western values is not accidental; there really is a dichotomisation in the discourse when referring to Daesh. In addition to all this, securitization is multidimensional (H.1.1), as shown by François Hollande's speeches in which he remarked that he will not only attack ISIS militarily in Syria but will also conduct actions on French territory through the establishment of an anti-terrorist alert at stage 5. Moreover, we must consider NATO's role in this case, as a functional actor with the capacity to influence existing dynamics. The dynamics it influences are military, as it is an intergovernmental military alliance. In this case, NATO was part of the CFTJ - OIR and undoubtedly influenced France's response to the attacks by carrying out the largest bombing in its history in ISIS's Syrian 'fiefdom': Raqqa (Público, 2015).

ATTACKS IN BRUSSELS ON 22 MARCH 2016

The Brussels attacks took place on 22 March 2016 in two locations: Zaventem airport and Baalbek metro station where 35 people were killed (including the terrorists) and 270 injured. At the airport, a couple of terrorists blew up their suicide waistcoats and, in the metro, only one jihadist exploded his suicide waistcoat. Like the Paris attackers, they had also travelled to Syria. In fact, one of the Belgian terrorists had a direct connection to the attack in the French capital (Cragin, 2017).

SPEECH ACTS

Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, 22 March 2016

“These attacks have hit Brussels today, Paris yesterday – but it is *Europe that has been targeted*. The European Union and its institutions stand united in the face of terrorism. We will continue our work, to face the terrorist threat together, and to bring European solutions to questions that concern us all” (Juncker, 2016 on European Commission, 2016).

Juncker's speech act shows the need for unity in the European Union, as the attack on Brussels is highly symbolic: the heart of the EU is under attack; and that is why unity is needed in the face of a threat that is existential.

Charles Michel, President of Belgium, 22 March 2016

“We will defend and *protect our values and freedom*. We are confronted with a barbaric enemy. But we are united” (Michel, 2016 on Taylor, 2016).

Again, as with the Paris attacks, the president of the country where the attacks took place, in this case Belgium dichotomises the issue between an "us" (European countries with values such as freedom) and a “them” (foreign fighters who confront the us with barbarism).

Mariano Rajoy, President of Spain, 22 March 2016

“There is no religion that can harbour such criminal fanaticism. There is no possible justification for this *barbarism* that affects us all and hits us all. The fight against terrorism demands perseverance from all of us, it demands dedication, it demands collaboration within Spain and outside Spain, and it demands intelligence. They [Belgian government and citizens] know that we are by their side, and they can count on the full cooperation of our country to locate and bring the murderers to justice” (Rajoy, 2016 on La Moncloa, 2016).

Mariano Rajoy, in this case as the legitimate authority of an EU member state [Spain], once again calls for the unity of member states and European institutions to put an end to this threat. Spain, as a country that suffered one of the worst jihadist attacks in the 21st century, offers its help and experience in this matter to put an end to a threat that affects everyone.

Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, 22 March 2016

“These attacks mark another low by the terrorists in the service of hatred and *violence*” (Tusk, 2016 on European Council, 2016).

This time again, European institutions continue to build the securitization process through speech acts using words such as violence to identify the threat of foreign fighters.

In these speeches, the one made by Jean-Claude Juncker is particularly relevant as it allows us to observe how one of our hypotheses (H.2) is beginning to be confirmed: the EU will continue its work against terrorism with European measures that bring solutions to all.

REFUGEES CRISIS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA, 2011 – 2018

In the context of the war in Syria, refugees fleeing the horror of a raw civil war in cities such as Raqqa or Aleppo made their way to European borders in countries such as Greece or Hungary. To understand the process of securitization of the phenomenon of foreign fighters, it is very important to look at some of the speeches of Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister.

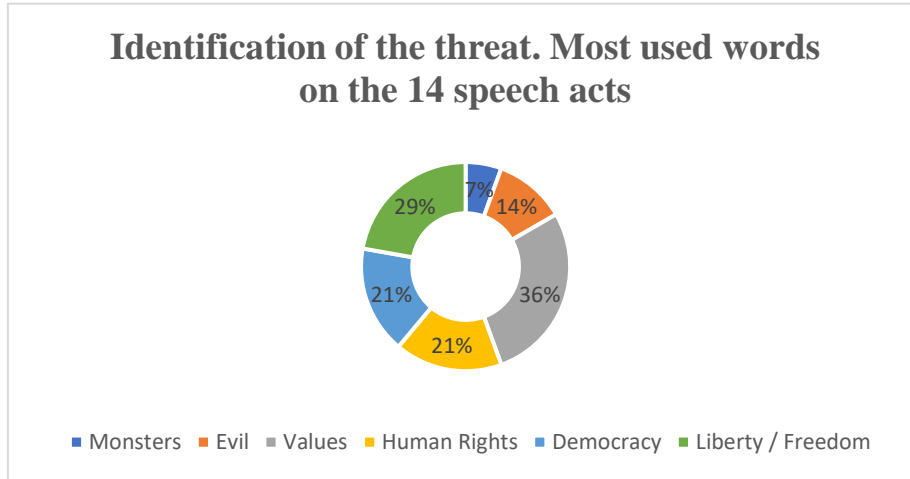
Viktor Orbán on the refugee's crisis, 5 September 2016

“The level of migrants entering Europe is set to surge as ISIS claims *hundreds of jihadists have arrived among refugees*. Europe and European culture have Christian roots and they are under threat” (Orbán, 2016 on Joseph et. Al, 2016).

This speech act is the clear example of how an agent provocateur works: in the first phase where a legitimate authority identifies an existential threat to security in reference to a referent object, the agent provocateur, who in this case also has legitimacy, increases the threat perception for his interests; justifying the treatment of refugees at the Hungarian borders and the closure of borders.

Figure 4

Identification of the object of reference in the foreign fighter's securitization process

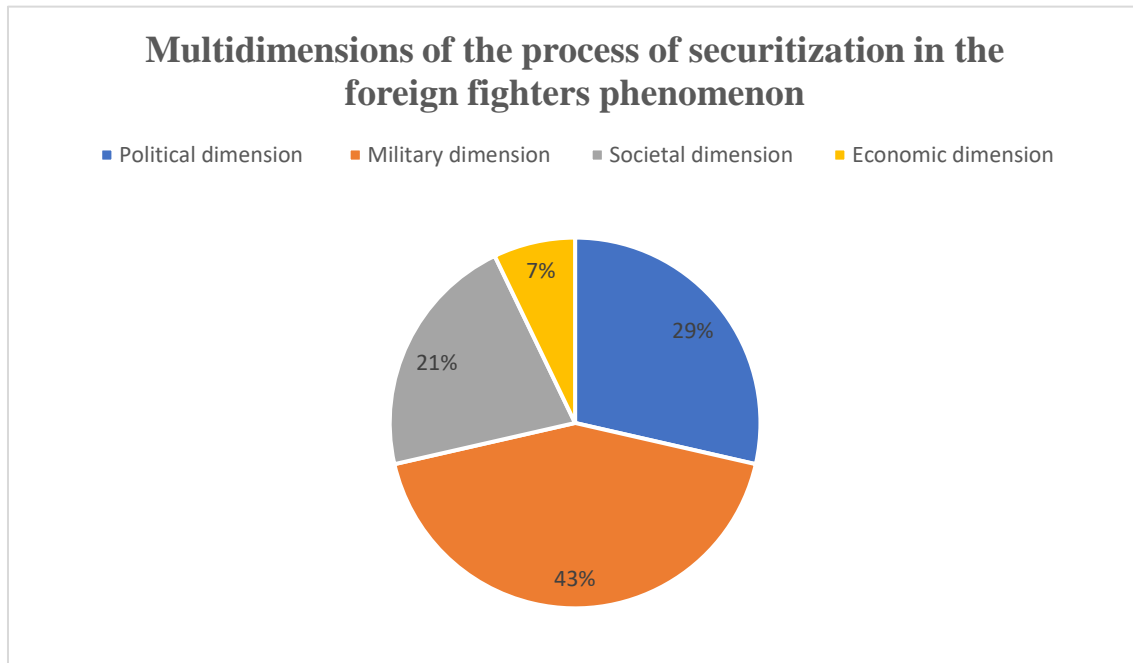


Source: own elaboration

This graph shows the words most frequently used by the securitising actor (EU authorities and Member State authorities) to refer to events where foreign fighters are involved, either far from EU borders (with the assassination of David Haines and the direct threat to the French state) or with a direct involvement in the Paris and Brussels attacks. This graph serves to begin to answer one of the research questions: how have the European Union and Member State authorities securitised the phenomenon of foreign fighters? They have securitised it by following the traditional process of securitization; by identifying a clear threat through their speech acts where words and adjectives are used that dichotomise the issue: an "us" who defend freedom and democratic values against a "them" who are monsters, evil and brutal. And, on the other hand, it allows us to verify that our hypothesis (H.1.2) is proved: the object of reference under threat are European citizens, European values, territorial sovereignty, and the security of the EU. It is not by chance that words such as freedom, fraternity, democracy, or human rights are used in the speeches, as they are intended to show that terrorists do not only want to attack in a material but also in a symbolic way.

Figure 5

Dimensions mentioned in the speech acts of the securitization of foreign fighter's phenomenon



Source: own elaboration

In this second figure, although it is a more difficult question to consider, we have used the same speech acts as a reference to observe whether another of our hypotheses (H.1.1) holds true. The hypothesis posited that securitization was a multidimensional process centred on the political, military, economic and societal spheres. First, the societal dimension exists, as it is a threat that directly affects European society and its values (referent objects), and we observe this in speech acts such as those of Hollande, Schulz, or Merkel. Secondly, the military sphere is very present in Hollande's speeches for several reasons: France's action in the war against ISIS in Syria and the immediate response on French territory after the 2015 massacre. The political component is also clear, as Juncker points out "We will continue to work [on solutions] and to bring European solutions to questions that affect us all". The economic component, on the other hand, is more difficult to identify, as there is no explicit reference to it except Hollande's announcement that there will be more airstrikes and consequently more financial resources will have to be invested.

3.3. Analysis of the European counter-terrorist strategy and its results

This third and final section is devoted exclusively to the second and third phases of the securitization process. The basis of the security measures applied to the phenomenon of foreign fighters lies on the one hand, in the [European Security Strategy \(ESS\)](#) of 2003, which identifies the terrorist phenomenon as a structural problem with multiple and complex causes and seeks to combat this multidimensional phenomenon through judicial and police measures. And on the other hand, in the [2005 Counter-Terrorism Strategy](#) is closely linked to the ESS with its four pillars of action: 1) prevent, 2) protect, 3) prosecute and 4) respond (Granado, 2015).

In this section there is also a selection of measures in which we have considered several characteristics and variables necessary for a coherent analysis of the second phase of the securitization process. The variables that have been taken into account are:

- 1) That these measures have the European Security Strategy of 2003 as their legal basis, as this is where all the general objectives of a multilateral approach to a multidimensional phenomenon (terrorism, in this case jihadism channelled through the phenomenon of foreign fighters) are set out.
- 2) That they are measures, directives, and strategies taken between 2014 and 2018 as this is the period considered in this research.
- 3) These measures should be subject to prior discussion in the EU, both within the European institutions and with the legitimate authorities of the Member States. This is considered an irreplaceable feature as it brings: a) coherence between the measures and b) legitimacy to the analysis, as there is a debate between the legitimate authorities that must carry out the implementation of extraordinary measures (second phase) of the securitization process.

We will analyse seven measures, directives, and strategies. In the analysis of counter-terrorism measures, we will focus especially on those measures that are specific to combating the phenomenon of foreign fighters, without forgetting that they are part of a broader fight. In order to carry out this analysis, we will take the [timeline proposed by the EU](#) itself on its website. For this analysis, we will introduce a dichotomous variable that

will enable us to approach the measures; we will consider whether they are preventive and proactive measures or repressive and restrictive measures.

2014

1. ADOPTION OF A COUNTER TERRORISM / FOREIGN FIGHTERS STRATEGY BY THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL – 20 OCTOBER 2014, ADOPTED ON JANUARY 2015

During the increased flow of new foreign fighters (see figure 1, p.8), the foreign affairs ministers of the Member States adopted the EU counter terrorism / foreign fighters strategy focusing on Syria and Iraq. Following the sub-hypotheses outlined above (H.1.1), the EU is beginning to approach the phenomenon through multidimensional securitization and multilateral treatment (H.2.1) presenting a strategy with a broad approach, covering several priority areas for action and a wide range of tools. These priority areas are: 1) political dimension, 2) prevention, 3) pursuit, 4) protection, 5) response and 6) engagement with key partners.

Outline of the counter-terrorism strategy for Syria and Iraq, with particular focus on foreign fighters – Brussels, 16 January 2015 – 5369/15

This strategy is one element of the EU's wider foreign security policy towards both Iraq and Syria and is built on the EU's criminal justice-based approach to tackling terrorism while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms; this leads us to categorise this strategy within the dichotomous variables as a preventive and proactive approach.

It is a comprehensive approach which includes an emphasis on preventive work (H.2.1 and H.2.2) and provide a longer-term framework that want to: a) minimises the risks to Europe and European interests and b) contributes to the strategic defeat of ISIL/Daesh including their ideology (European Council, 2015a).

Actions adopted by the new strategy:

1. Ensure a decrease of the threat; staunch the flow of new recruits with a broader and more coherent approach and a wider range of tools.

2. Increase the prevent work, especially the external prevent work under the EU CT strategy (2005) that needs to be sensitive to differing motivations for travel. Strengthen the efforts to fight the possible sources of ISIS financial and recruitment needs.
3. Work with and in third countries that are significant sources of foreign fighters, particularly the Maghreb or transit countries.
4. Provide alternative non-violent outlets such as diversionary activity for those who are attracted to the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts.
5. Prioritise online work and combat online incitement to hostility or violence.

This document is much more illuminating regarding the second phase of the securitization process. On the one hand, it is undeniable that the phenomenon of foreign fighters has implications for the EU's counter-terrorism strategy in terms of new measures, as noted in H2 above; the EU proposes a more coherent approach to the phenomenon, seeking to understand the deep roots of terrorism. In the same vein, it is proposed that part of the efforts (both material and strategic) be devoted to cooperation with third countries. It also highlights the importance of approaching a multidimensional phenomenon through a preventive approach (H.2.1) as noted in point 2.

2015

2. NEW VISIONS OF COUNTER-TERRORISM – JANUARY – MARCH 2015

Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks on 7 January 2015, the EU reaffirmed its position to amplify its fight against terrorism with a multilateral, preventive and proactive approach. On 19 January 2015, the Council discussed on how foreign policy can complement the fight against terrorism within the EU, and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy at that time, Federica Mogherini noted that because of this event, there was a real awareness that they needed to work together to fight a common threat. Is for this reason that the EU continued with its idea of strengthening the exchange of information and reinforcing the cooperation with Arab and Mediterranean countries (European Council, 2015b).

In March 2015, the Council resumed discussions about the implementation of the measures contained in the counter-terrorism statements issued after the latest terrorist attacks in Europe reaching several agreements:

- 1) Strengthen surveillance at external borders and reinforcement of the resources and operational capacities of Frontex.
- 2) Reinforcing the application of the Schengen Framework.
- 3) Combating radicalisation on the internet by setting internet referral capabilities.
- 4) Stepping up information sharing and operational cooperation.

3. NEW MEASURES FOR PREVENTING RADICALISATION

One of the tools that both the EU and the member states have played with the most is the prevention of jihadist radicalisation. Radicalisation is a particularly important issue for the phenomenon of foreign fighters, as it is the easiest way for ISIS to recruit. Terrorist groups have used information and communication technologies in their operations; Daesh has also taken advantage of ICTs and used them to express its views and spread its message (Shamie and Szenes, 2015). ISIS represents a new era in terrorist recruitment using a particularly sophisticated media strategy (Tadjdeh, 2014) with two purposes: a) a threatening and brutal message directed towards the enemy (in this case, the EU) and b) another discourse towards its sympathisers, which invites them to realise the jihadist utopia of participating in the creation of a new political order: the Caliphate (Napoleoni, 2015).

Since 2015, the EU Internet Forum has brought a platform to exchange information on trends in and the evolution of terrorists' use of the internet. In this regard, the EU launched the *Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)* which is a network of over 6.000 frontline practitioners from across Europe (teachers, police officers and prison staff) which promotes the exchange of best practices. Their work aims to improve the understanding of why people are more vulnerable to radicalisation and what actions can be taken to protect them.

These proposals help us to observe several facts: the first is that they are entirely pre-emptive measures, as they are intended to prevent people vulnerable to ISIS propaganda from being drawn in by its constant announcements to expand its army of foreign fighters. On the other hand, it reconfirms several hypotheses: H2; securitization has implications in terms of creating new measures and institutions, H.2.1; it is a preventive and proactive approach to deal with the phenomenon and H.2.2 where civilian means are combined, broadly understood as the intervention of experts to prevent the phenomenon through proaction.

2016

4. APPROVAL OF THE EU PASSENGER NAME RECORD (PNR)

One of the major proposals of the legitimate authorities of the securitization process, in this case the EU and the high authorities of the Member States was the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) which is a preventive and proactive measure. The PNR is personal information provided by passengers and collected and held by air carriers. It includes information such as the name of the passenger, travel dates or itineraries. The PNR directive regulates the transfer of such data to member states' law enforcement authorities and their processing for prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of terrorist offences. Since late 2013 and early 2014, when the flow of European foreign fighters joining Daesh's ranks began to be of concern to the EU, PNR was one of the first measures on the agenda. The European Parliament and the Council agreed on a compromise text in December 2015. The council adopted the directive in April 2016.

This directive is particularly relevant to the phenomenon of foreign fighters for several reasons. The first is that it sets a precedent in the exchange of sensitive information between European authorities, airlines, and member states. To combat the phenomenon of foreign fighters, it is an essential directive, as they have access to both the name and dates of travel and most importantly the destination. The second is that it makes it possible to monitor people suspected of radicalisation and prevent several situations: a) that they travel to Syria and Iraq and join the ranks of ISIS, b) that their radicalisation increases and c) that after this trip they become 'returnees' who attack European citizenship, its values and the security and territorial sovereignty of the EU.

Although this directive is one of the most important in the process of securitization of the foreign fighter phenomenon, it came a little late, especially for France, which was devastated in 2015 with the attacks of January and November, where, as we have already observed in Figure 3 (p.26), they were largely perpetrated by foreign fighters.

5. COUNCIL DECISION (CFSP) 2016/1693 OF 20 SEPTEMBER 2016 CONCERNING RESTRICTIVE MEASURES AGAINST ISIL (DAE'SH) AND AL-QAEDA AND PERSONS, GROUPS, UNDERTAKINGS AND ENTITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THEM AND REPEALING COMMON POSITION 2002/402/CFSP

Following the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Belgium in March 2016, the European Council decided to adopt new restrictive measures against the threat posed by Daesh. This council decision is based on the Treaty on European Union, and in particular the Article 29 thereof.

Article 2 of this package of measures is of particular interest for the phenomenon of foreign fighters, since, as stated in 2.1, Member States have the obligation to take the necessary measures (following the travel restrictions established by the UNSC in UNSCRs [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1333 \(2000\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#)) to prevent the entry of any person who has a relationship with ISIS, be it economic/financial or an affiliation, as is the case of foreign fighters. The same article, section 2, reaffirms the need for Member States and the European authorities themselves to restrict the entry into the Schengen area of persons suspected of belonging to ISIS, even if they have European nationality. They also stress the need to restrict the freedom of movement of European persons intending to travel to areas where the Islamic State is active, especially Syria and Iraq, using the PNR directive as the main tool to carry out this task.

In this sense, this measure is more difficult to establish in the dichotomy proposed above. On the one hand, it is more than evident that these actions are preventive in nature: to prevent attacks from being carried out on European soil. On the other hand, it is also restrictive in nature, as it precisely restricts people's freedom of movement in the interests of EU security.

2017

6. NEW DIRECTIVE ON COMBATING TERRORISM – MARCH – JUNE 2017

The evolving terrorist threat demands an adaptation and extension of the tools by the EU. These new rules, in the form of a Directive, strengthen and widen the scope of the existing legislation ([Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA](#)) and criminalises (European Council, 2017):

- a) Travelling within, outside or to the EU for terrorist purposes.
- b) The organisation and facilitation of such travel.
- c) Training and being trained for terrorist purposes.
- d) Providing or collecting funds for terrorist acts.

This new directive is particularly interesting as it takes a multilateral approach and does not only look at combating the phenomenon of foreign fighters in a superficial way, but also considers various factors such as the help received by these people from third actors to travel and join the ranks of ISIS or the funding for a relatively long and costly travel. It is particularly relevant because it shows that the EU is aware that the securitization of the foreign fighter phenomenon requires an understanding of the roots of terrorism.

2018

7. NEW RULES TO STRENGTHEN SECURITY IN THE EU – NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2018

In terms of the creation and adaptation of new specific measures, 2018 is the most moderate year, with only one package of measures approved at the end of the year. On the one hand, the EU continues to pursue the objective of increasing border security by strengthening the Schengen Information System introducing additional categories of alerts to the system to strengthen the capacity to detect possible persons suspected of being, or becoming, foreign fighters (European Council, 2018a):

1. New alerts on unknown suspects or wanted persons.
2. Alerts for the purpose of return, especially focusing on foreign fighters who want to return to their country origin to commit terrorist acts.
3. Access to the SIS will be allowed for bodies such as EUROPOL and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency to carry out more effective work.

The other point that the EU reinforced in 2018 was the 'other side of the coin' of the foreign fighter phenomenon: their radicalisation. Thus, it reinforced the fight against radicalisation on the internet: the new rules apply to hosting service providers offering services in the EU and they have the obligation to remove terrorist content or disable access to it within one hour from receiving a removal order from authorities; the cooperation between law enforcement authorities and service providers are improved through the establishment of points of contact to facilitate the handling of removal orders and referrals (European Council, 2018b).

ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC OPINION: THIRD PHASE OF THE SECURITIZATION PROCESS

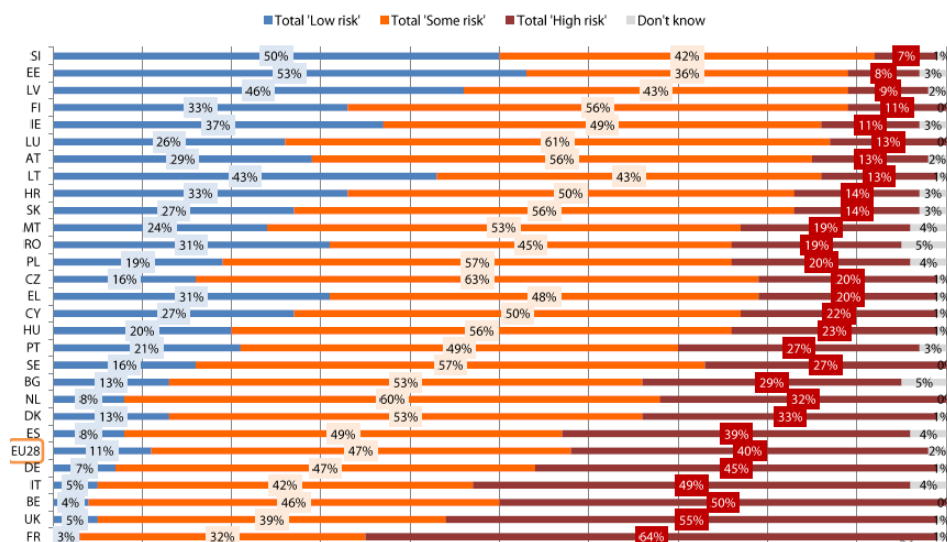
The last phase of the securitization process is to determine whether the first two phases (identifying the threat and adopting extraordinary measures) have been successful, based on public opinion surveys, in this case those carried out by the EU through the Eurobarometer. It should be noted that we will not analyse all the questions of the regular Eurobarometer (81, 82 and 83) as they are not specific to terrorism.

To begin with, we will take Eurobarometer 81 from spring 2014, where terrorism only accounted for 2% of Europeans' concerns, and in Eurobarometer 82 from December of the same year, 6% (Díaz, 2017). This minimised threat perception in the first half of 2014 can be explained for several reasons: the first is that the European population sees the terrorist threat as an external phenomenon that is taking place in a context of war (in Syria) where there is more ease of instability and an increase in violent non-state actors. In addition, ISIS has not yet proclaimed the Caliphate in Mosul and has called on the ummah to defend Islam beyond the Middle East. Moreover, by the end of that same year the threat perception was already becoming more latent for several reasons: Abu Bakr Al

Baghdadi had already proclaimed the Caliphate in Mosul and called on the entire ummah to fight for Islam and against the infidels (in the West). Also, the European authorities themselves through their speech acts had begun to identify ISIS as an international threat that could undermine European citizenship and its values: David Cameron's speech act after the death of David Haines demonstrates this: although ISIS - at that time - was only strong in the Middle East, it could also attack European citizens, and therefore EU values.

We note that in Eurobarometer 83, just after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, this threat perception increased to 17% and in the Eurobarometer 84, in December 2015, just a month later than the November attacks in Paris the perception increased to 25% (Eurobarometer, 2015). Nonetheless, to observe whether the third phase of securitization has been completed, we must turn to the special Eurobarometer on terrorism. We will take as our main source the [European Parliament's Special Eurobarometer on perceptions and expectations of the fight against terrorism and radicalisation](#), conducted between April 2016 for two reasons: the first is that it is a special Eurobarometer that focuses on investigating, precisely, whether the securitization process is being successful, and the second is the date; as 2016 represents half of the years of our research, the data is already representative.

Figure 6
Perception of the risk of a terrorist attack

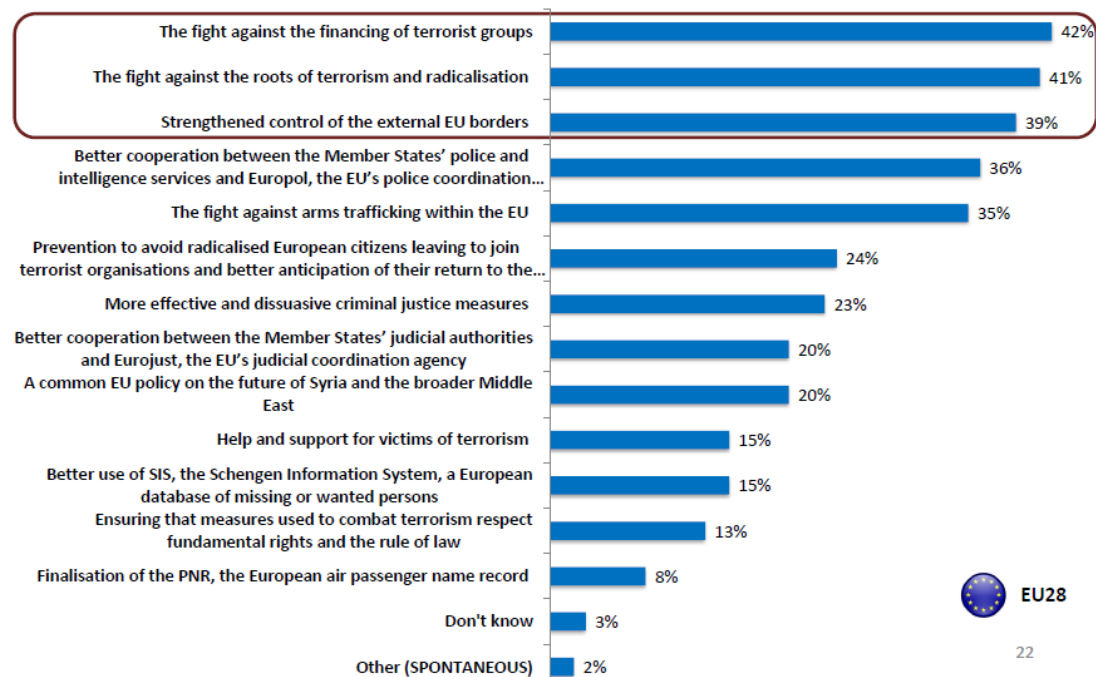


Source: Eurobarometer Special on terrorism, 2016

Figure 6 shows that on a scale of very low to very high risk of a terrorist attack, the EU28 was as high as 40% in 2016, increasing exponentially on the data mentioned above, this Eurobarometer presents us with a decisive conclusion on EU action against terrorism: 69% of respondents from the 28 countries (before Brexit) believe that action is insufficient in the face of such a threat and 82% would like to see more measures. This leads to both our research questions and several hypotheses. In the first instance, we can affirm that both the EU and Member State authorities have indeed successfully securitised the phenomenon of foreign fighters (H1), although the data might lead us to believe otherwise. Several factors should be taken into account in this analysis: the lack of specific Eurobarometer on terrorism means that the results of securitization are very limited; nor should we forget that the process is successful because European citizens consider: 1) that foreign fighters are a threat to their integrity and values, as well as to sovereignty and security; and 2) they identify the EU as the legitimate authority to carry out more measures and, in fact, demand that it does so.

Figure 7

Most urgent measures to fight against terrorism.



Source: Eurobarometer Special on terrorism, 2016

Figure 7 shows that the European public is demanding more measures to fight foreign fighters: 39% call for more border controls and 24% consider preventing radicalised people from travelling to Syria and Iraq as most urgent; another noteworthy point is that as many as 41% demand more measures to fight the deep roots of terrorism. These facts relate directly to our hypothesis: the legitimate authorities have successfully securitised the phenomenon (H1) to such an extent that European citizens understand the multidimensionality of the phenomenon (H.1.1) and demand a multilateral approach (H.2.1) with different means, ranging from military to social (H.2.2).

Finally, with the data provided by this Eurobarometer, we can reach some initial conclusions that will be developed further in the following section. The first and most important is that the securitization process has been carried out correctly: the European population considers the phenomenon of foreign fighters, intrinsically linked to terrorism, to be a threat to its integrity, European values, EU sovereignty and security. Furthermore, the measures that were being implemented in 2016 were seen as insufficient; the PNR had not yet been approved, nor had the new directives with a more multilateral vision of the issue. They also consider that the EU and the Member States are the ones who must carry out this implementation of new measures, and 23% of the respondents consider that they should do it jointly.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

After conducting this research from different angles; a brief look at the history of ISIS and the phenomenon of foreign fighters, a review of the theory of securitization and how it has been applied in this case, it is time to combine the findings of the previous sections and answer the research questions: How have the European Union and the authorities of the Member States securitised the phenomenon of ISIS foreign fighters? and What implications does the securitization of the foreign fighter phenomenon have for the EU's counter-terrorism strategy? What policy responses have been given? Have they been effective? and, compile the hypotheses studied.

On the one hand, through the different documents, bibliography, data, and public opinion surveys provided throughout the research, we can affirm that the securitization process of the foreign fighter phenomenon has been carried out correctly following the three stages proposed by the Copenhagen School. The legitimate authorities (securitising agent), in this case the EU and the authorities of the Member States have carried out between 2014 and 2018 a series of speech acts where a threat (the phenomenon of foreign fighters) has been identified against a referent object (European citizenship and values, and EU sovereignty and security). The securitising actor has also understood the need to respond to the threat with concrete public security policies that are adapted to the unique context and characteristics of foreign fighters. And finally, although data are scarce, European citizens in the 2016 Special Eurobarometer identify foreign fighters and the jihadist terrorist phenomenon as an existential threat (up to 40% of respondents considered the risk of attack to be very high and 47% considered it to be high, see figure 6) to their security that must be addressed by the EU and Member State authorities, thus completing the process of securitization. Securitization has been carried out in a multidimensional approach, responding to the nature of the threat. Not only has the military dimension been addressed (as in Hollande's and Cazaneuve's speeches) but there is also a political and societal dimension, understanding the roots of the phenomenon as intrinsically linked to marginalised contexts where radicalisation is more likely to occur. There is also an economic dimension, especially in the third phase of securitization, where as many as 42% of the population believe that more economic countermeasures against terrorist financing are needed.

On the other hand and taking into account the analysis developed in the last part of the research and the second research question, the implications for the EU's counter-terrorism strategy have been numerous, and we must classify them into material and immaterial implications for the threat. By immaterial implications we refer to everything that the securitization of the phenomenon has provoked in ideological terms in the fight against terrorism: new approaches to the phenomenon (multilateral, preventive and proactive approach), new visions of the process (multidimensional) and the understanding that the phenomenon of foreign fighters is intertwined with radicalisation and with the multiple and structural causes of terrorism, which range from the Salafist ideology to the conflicts in the Middle East and the marginalisation of certain communities in Europe. Policy responses have been numerous, as noted in section 3.3. Existing norms such as the ESS and the 2005 Strategy have been reinforced, following the four pillars of action: 1) prevention, 2) protection, 3) prosecution and 4) response, but as is natural in a process of securitization, new policies have also been created, in particular the strategy against foreign fighters (5369/15), which seeks communication with third countries and a reinforcement of prevention against radicalisation in sensitive contexts. Another new response is the PNR directive, a proactive and preventive measure that seeks on the one hand, to prevent radicalised people from travelling to countries where ISIS is strong on the ground and, on the other hand, to keep track of people who may be part of the returnee phenomenon.

As to whether they have been effective or not, we must point out that this research has some limitations that should not be forgotten. On the one hand, when we talk about terrorism, and especially the phenomenon of foreign fighters, the data are particularly sensitive, as there are some impediments because the data on foreign fighters is rather inconclusive since when the phenomenon began, all the tools such as a database of suspected persons did not exist and, moreover, the number of fighters killed in Europe in Syria and Iraq is unreliable, as it does not come from official sources. Also, Eurobarometer are especially limited in the chosen period, as there is only one special Eurobarometer in 2016 and it is very difficult to determine from here whether policies were being effective for several reasons: 1) specific rules such as PNR had not yet been approved and 2) there is no other Eurobarometer to compare public opinion. Nevertheless,

and with the data we have now, the use of PNR data has delivered tangible results in the fight against terrorism and serious crime: law enforcement authorities report that PNR data has been successfully used to plan their interventions in advance, to identify previously unknown suspects, to establish links between members of crime groups, and to verify the assumed “*modus operandi*” of serious criminals.

It is necessary to highlight that the process of securitization of foreign fighters is necessary to combat all the security challenges posed by terrorism. However, this process must be translated into counterterrorist measures that, on the one hand, are accepted and seen as necessary by the European population and, on the other, continue to focus on the multiple causes of the phenomenon (radicalisation, marginalisation, terrorist financing, violent ideologies, and conflicts in the Middle East), leaving aside discriminatory discourses towards communities that form part of the European Union. Securitization measures cannot and should not divide the European population but must be synonymous of security.

Finally, and to conclude this research, it is necessary to emphasise that this dissertation provides a basis for a doctoral thesis in the very near future: the contemporary terrorist phenomenon, especially that of jihadist inspiration, has become in recent decades one of the greatest threats to the international system and the states that constitute it. For this reason, it is necessary to continue researching the phenomenon in all possible areas, with an emphasis on the processes of radicalisation and the deep roots of terrorism. This study, then, is the beginning of a broader doctoral research that aims to understand the jihadist phenomenon in its entirety in order to be able to provide effective and efficient responses.

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