

# Migration as a Securitized Phenomenon: An Analysis of the Societal Security in Terms of EU Perception<sup>1</sup>

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Güvenleştirilmiş Bir Olgu Olarak Göç: Toplumsal Güvenliğin AB Algısı Açısından Analizi

Migration As a Securitized Phenomenon: An Analysis of the Societal Security in Terms of EU Perception

Öz

21. yüzyılda iletişim ve ulaşım imkanlarının çeşitlenmesi düzenli göç hareketlerini kolaylaştırmakla kalmamış aynı zamanda düzensiz göçün de hacim ve boyut değiştirmesine neden olmuştur. Göçmenler, gittikleri ülkelerin demografik, sosyolojik ve ekonomik yapılarını önemli ölçüde etkilediği gibi, aynı zamanda güvenlik konularının da öznesi haline gelmiştir. Avrupa Birliği (AB) üyesi ülkeler, yüksek yaşam ve çalışma koşulları, ekonomik refahı, insan haklarına saygılı yönetim şekilleri gibi çekici etkenlerden dolayı göç hareketlerinin hedefinde yer almaktadır. Göçmenlerin AB toplumunun dili, dini, kültürel değerleri, gelenekleri ve ulusal kimliklerini içeren toplumsal güvenliğini tehdit ettiği iddiaları, siyaset ve akademik çevrelerde sıklıkla tartışılmaya başlanmıştır. Bu anlamda çalışmanın temel amacı, göçün AB'nin toplumsal güvenliğini tehdit edip etmediğini veya AB toplumunda böyle bir algının olup olmadığını ortaya koymaktır. Elde edilen bulgular, göçün toplumsal güvenliğe yönelik tehdit oluşturduğuna dair AB toplumunda güçlü bir algı olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** AB, Göç, Göçmen, Toplumsal Güvenlik, Tehdit

Abstract

In the 21st century, the diversification of communication and transportation opportunities has not only facilitated regular migration movements but also led to changes in the volume and dimensions of irregular migration. Migrants not only significantly influence the demographic, sociological, and economic structures of the countries they move to but have also become subjects of security concerns. Member countries of the European Union (EU) are targeted by migration movements due to attractive factors such as high living and working conditions, economic prosperity, and governance styles that respect human rights. Claims that migrants threaten the societal security of the EU by affecting its language, religion, cultural values, traditions, and national identities have become frequent topics of discussion in political and academic circles. In this regard, the main aim of the study is to determine whether migration poses a threat to the societal security of the EU or if such a perception exists in EU society. The findings indicate a strong perception in EU society that migration constitutes a threat to societal security.

**Keywords:** EU, Migration, Immigrant, Societal Security, Threat

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma Makalesi

**Paper Type:** Research Article

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## **1. Introduction**

The post-Cold War era has witnessed the abandoning of the traditional understanding of security by expanding and deepening it. The framework of the new security has led the migration to be considered as a security threat and has taken its place in security policies. The post-Cold War period has not only changed the concept of security but also radically changed the international system. One of the most important phenomena affected by this transformation is undoubtedly international migration since change was observed in size and quality in the 1990s.

After the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), travel restrictions were lifted, and mass migrations began to move from the former Eastern Bloc countries to Western European countries. Hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the Bosnia-Herzegovina War and the internal conflicts on the African continent have turned to Europe, which they see as a safe land. Mass migration movements to the European Union (EU) member states have mostly been irregular and due to the effects of migration, national security, public order, economic security, and societal security are at stake (Papadopoulos, 2011: 455-456). However, the 9/11 events and the terrorist acts in Madrid and London draw attention as the most important variables in which migration is associated with terrorism. Migration policies, which were considered from a relatively liberal and immigrant-oriented perspective have then begun to be considered as a threat to public order (Huysmans, 2000: 751-777).

The mass exodus to the EU caused by the Arab Spring in 2011 reminded the 9/11 events. Especially in 2015, when the uncontrolled entry of millions of irregular migrants into the EU raised the debate that migration threatens the public order and internal security area as well as the societal security of the EU, (Obergruber, 2015) including its language, religion, cultural values, traditions, and national identities.

Since the 1990s, the changing nature of migration has captured the attention of academic circles, giving rise to a series of academic studies and policy documents examining the relationship between migration and security. In this context, our study focuses on how migration has affected the societal security of the EU from 1990 to 2023 and how it has been perceived as a threat within society. This is because the integration of migrants into society, their adaptation, and their contribution to the workforce are of utmost importance for social stability and security. The study aims to reveal whether migration threatens the societal security of the EU or whether there is perception in this direction in the EU. Regular and irregular migrants and refugees in EU member states stand out as the main variables that are thought to have an impact on societal security. Therefore, these variables were primarily quantitatively revealed, and the surveys conducted in EU countries were used to measure their effects on society. Surveys are organized at regular intervals in EU member states to investigate the society's view of the issue. In addition to the Standard Eurobarometer questionnaires prepared by the EU Commission, the questionnaires organized by the PEW Research Center were analysed in the study. As a result of the analysis, some inferences were made about the EU society's view of migration and whether migration is perceived as a threat to societal security. However, at the EU level, migration movements are often strongly associated with national security concerns in the formulation of common migration policies. The rights of migrants and human security can also become integral aspects of migration policies, leading to debates about whether we should prioritize human security or national security within the context of societal security.

### **1.1. The Concept of Security: A Retrospective Perspective**

The concept of security covers the activities conducted by individuals, groups, societies, and states to protect their existence. In a general sense, security policies and devices are aimed at identifying the elements that threaten their existence, and it is reinterpreted every time according to the threat and threat perceptions of the period. As Hans Gunter Brauch expresses, security is a concept that changes depending on the conditions of the period and adapts to subjects, situations, and individuals (2008: 2). As such, the concept of security emerges as a dynamic process and gains new meanings and different dimensions according to the threats of the time. For this reason, the concept of security has been a

highly controversial topic in the International Relations (IR) literature, and it is possible to come across multiple definitions of security.

Security involves the elimination of the environment of insecurity. This content means that the environment of insecurity is perceived as a threat. It doesn't matter if the threat is a real danger or not. A threat is defined as objective if it is based on real facts and events, and as a subjective threat if it is based on perception or predictions. Even subjective threats that are unlikely to occur can be considered dangers. On the other hand, it is necessary to take precautions in the presence of any objective and subjective threat when considering security threats (Dedeoğlu, 2008: 22-3).

Security and threat are intertwined concepts, and there exists an inseparable link between them. The threat triggers the concept of security and continuous security measures are taken on account of threat detections. These security measures reveal different threat elements, causing more security measures to be taken (Küçükşahin & Akkan, 2007: 44).

After World War II, a new definition called the traditional understanding of security became widely used. In the traditional understanding of security, where realist theory is dominant, threats originate from the state and are also overseen in a narrow scope towards the state. Security is defined in a military force-based context, and it is considered in the realm of strategy. In other words, the threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state originate from the military. Therefore, non-military threats are not regarded as threats according to the traditional understanding of security. The individuals and societies that make up the state have been accepted as a part of the state and state security has been made the subject of the concept of security. This approach discussed military issues that concern the survival of the state are disposed at the level of "*high politics*"; economic, socio-cultural, and environmental issues are disposed at the level of "*low politics*" (Ullman, 1983: 129-33).

The end of the Cold War witnessed expansionist/deepening approaches that brought a critical look at realism-based perceptions when definitions of security from mainstream IR theories began to come to the fore. Since the end of the 1980s, the concept of security has been gradually expanded and deepened in a multipolar world. In addition to the understanding of military security, an understanding that includes many different political, economic, social, and environmental sectors has gained increasing importance within the concept of security (Buzan, 1983). This refers to an actual diversification of the concept of security in IR literature.

On the one hand, the concept of security has been deepened by adding new reference objects such as the individual, society, and the whole universe to the security as well as the mourning of the state, and on the other hand, the concept of security has been expanded with several new threats other than the military threat. Irregular migration and human trafficking, environmental disasters, ethnic violence, climate change, epidemics, terrorism, cross-border crimes, economic crises, and financial bottlenecks have been incorporated into the security field (Baysal & Lüleci, 2015).

According to Ian Clark, the deterioration of the natural environment, transboundary migration movements, epidemics such as AIDS, international terrorism, out-of-control weapons, global economic crises, etc., and threats that directly affect individuals and societies have led to the replacement of the concept of state security with the concept of society and individual security (1999).

The Copenhagen School, led by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde has resulted in a significant transformation in security studies, especially since the 1990s. Barry Buzan, one of the pioneers of this approach, looked at security on a different scale than the traditional perspective; and added military, political, economic, environmental, and societal security issues to security (Buzan, 1991).

## 1.2. Societal Security

The post-Cold War era revealed a proliferation of diverse theoretical and methodological approaches within security studies. These novel approaches transcend the classical security paradigm, which had a narrow, institutionally state-centric emphasis on national security. Instead, they place non-state actors at the center of their focus. It is seen that the new threats that emerged with the effect of globalization directly target individuals and societies by showing cross-border characteristics.

The key reason behind the reconceptualization of the concept of security is based on the notion of survival. The traditional security that is state security was concerned with threats to its sovereignty where it was thought that if a state loses its sovereignty, it would not be able to survive as a state whereas one of the modern concepts of security that are societal security is concerned with its identity. In the same way, it has been considered that if a society loses its identity, it will not be able to survive as a society. Against this backdrop, precisely, states can be made insecure through threats to their societies (Roe 2007: 166). It, therefore, pertains to the enduring viability of conventional aspects like language, culture, social bonds, as well as religious and national identity within conditions conducive to evolution.

The new understanding of security put forward by the Copenhagen School in the conceptualization of societal security is quite remarkable. Societal security represents a shift away from a state-centered approach towards a security understanding that focuses on society and individuals, rather than solely on military security. The concept of societal security was first used by Buzan in his book "People, States, and Fear." According to Buzan, an important dimension of security is societal security. Societal security is about the preservation, development, and reproduction of societies, their language and culture, traditions, religious and national identities under acceptable conditions of change. In his works, Buzan emphasizes identity and cultural values and deals with identity conflicts and migration from the periphery to the center (Buzan, 1991). Thus, social identities become "objective" realities in which security dynamics will be shaped. The point of analysis of the understanding of societal security is the social units that are socially constructed but at the same time have gained objectivity. The Copenhagen School's relatively consistent treatment of society has made it possible for society to become the subject of security threats (Sheehan, 2005: 87-88).

From this point of view, social security can be defined as the mechanisms developed against the threats created by various social problems, especially mass migration movements, for the national identity, common culture, traditions, and customs that make up the society and the sense of self. Considering the existence of new threats that directly target individuals and society today, social security emerges as an important dimension of internal security.

Another pioneer of the Copenhagen School, Ole Waever, has intensified his work in the field of societal security. Waever has further enriched the concept by bringing a new perspective to societal security. According to him, societal security is defined as the security sphere in which societies can protect and reproduce themselves without state intervention. Waever links societal security to collective structures and the identity of society but does not limit it to national security. By placing identity at the center of societal security, he argues that the threat to identity is also directed at society. From this point of view, it can be said that Waever identifies societal security with identity security. Therefore, if any community characterizes a development or a situation against its identity as a threat or if perception is formed in this direction, societal security is threatened (Waever, 2008: 155).

Threats to societal security originate from various sectors. In this context, Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998: 121) have categorized these threats into three main groups: migration (where the composition of the host country's society changes due to an influx of people from outside), horizontal competition (where groups are influenced to alter their behaviour because of the dominant linguistic and cultural impact of others), and vertical competition (which either pushes groups toward broader or narrower identities through integration or disintegration).

Waever emphasizes the most common issues that threaten societal security as migration and population decline (Waever, 2008: 158). The rise in immigrant population within a society gives rise to

concerns that their presence might stifle the identity and culture of the local community, induce alterations in traditions, and jeopardize cultural heritage. Therefore, immigration is perceived as a threat to state security, especially in the realm of social security (Papadopoulos, 2011: 455-456).

However, there are also other sectors, including military, political, economic, and environmental, through which society may face threats (Roe, 2007: 170–171). In the military sector, threats can originate from both external and internal sources. External military threats can endanger society through depopulation caused by loss of life, displacement, or deportation. External military aggression not only imperils state sovereignty but also directly threatens societal security. On the other hand, internal military aggression can also pose a threat to society when a regime, representing a specific group, deploys armed forces to suppress minority groups. Similarly, a government, as the representative of the people, may misuse its authority to suppress minority groups.

In addition to the above areas of societal insecurity, globalization is a significant factor to consider. Globalization has made information easily accessible and sharable, facilitated the import and export of cultural products through agreements and similar means, and encouraged international migration for various purposes. Consequently, this process has ushered in numerous changes. Over time, there has been an increasing influx of foreign cultural products, such as movies, music, and publications, which has expanded exposure to other societies. Yet, in the long term, this can dilute local culture and erode a society's own cultural identity. In this context, any society may risk losing its unique characteristics that set it apart from others (Salvin, 2019: 5). In response to these security threats, society can adopt two distinct approaches. Firstly, society may seek to bring these threats to the attention of the state's security agenda. In other words, securitization of threats can be demanded by society. Secondly, society may also opt, or be compelled, to protect itself through non-state mechanisms.

## **2. Migration Movements to the EU**

It is worth considering the migration dynamics that Europe faced in the period after World War II by dividing them into four periods. In the first period between 1945 and 1973, migration movements toward Europe confronted us in two different dimensions. The decolonization and border changes that took place in the new world order that emerged after the War constitute the first dimension of mass migrations. After the independence of the former British colonies, immigration started from these countries to the United Kingdom. The return of the French settlers in Algeria were the remarkable intercontinental migration movements of this period (Zimmerman, 2005: 137). In addition, due to the border changes in Europe, about 15 million people in Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia were forced to migrate from their lands (Stalker, 2002).

Labor migration was the second dimension of migration movements to Europe between 1945 and 1973. After the War, Western European countries made great economic breakthroughs, and accordingly, a labour shortage emerged. Western European countries, which could not close this gap with their populations, preferred to close their labour deficits by transferring labour from their former colonies or neighbouring countries (Canpolat&Ariner, 2012: 12).

The second phase of migration movements to Europe started with the 1973 Oil Crisis and extended until 1990 when the Cold War ended. The economic recession created by the 1973 Oil Crisis led to an increase in unemployment in Western European countries, and these countries could not even employ their citizens. Therefore, guest worker programs were suspended during this period (Koca, 2002).

The most important feature of this period in terms of migration movements is that there has been a mental transformation in Western Europe in terms of the phenomenon of migration. In Western Europe, the concept of guest workers has begun to give way to the phenomenon of foreigners. Thus, the issue of migration gained another meaning, while foreigners were defined as "others" in society, new arrangements were put on the agenda for them (Tekin, 2007). Migrant has been perceived as a "problem," a potential threat, and therefore migration itself has been seen as a phenomenon that needs to be controlled (Castles & Miller, 2008: 131). In other words, migration has started to be

considered as a security threat and has taken its place in security policies (Ferrera, 2005: 141). When the migration policies related to the second period of migration movements towards Europe are evaluated in general, the concern that migration may pose a threat to society started to become a matter of concern during this period for the first time.

The third period, which began with the end of the Cold War and lasted until the Arab Spring, faced a wave of migration within Europe. The internal turmoil and political instabilities that began in the former Eastern Bloc countries, coupled with the reduction of transportation fees and the lifting of travel restrictions, have made it attractive and easy for the citizens of these countries to migrate to Western Europe. In addition, the internal conflicts and massacres in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as a result of the disintegration of Yugoslavia during this period, the Algerian civil war, and other conflicts and internal instabilities in Africa and the Middle East caused mass migration to Europe (Hansen, 2003: 35).

The total number of migrants from Middle Eastern and African countries to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries increased by 42% from 2001 to 2010, and from 3.5 million to nearly 5 million. Most of the increase in migration to OECD countries (91%) was realized in the EU countries. Italy, Spain, and France, which were located on the Mediterranean coast, faced intensive irregular migration during this period (OECD, International Migration Outlook, 2010).

The most important dynamic that changed EU society's view of migration was the 9/11 attacks. The fact that the terrorists who carried out those attacks were foreigners exacerbated the fear of foreigners and anti-immigrant sentiment in the EU countries. The Madrid and London terror attacks have further increased the climate of fear in society. Far-right political parties such as Northern League in Italy, Freedom Party in Austria, and Alternative for Germany in Germany with anti-immigrant rhetoric associated immigrants with terrorism and sometimes brought them to the forefront of discussions of economic stability and cultural identity (Elmas&Kutlay, 2011: 13).

The period between the Arab Spring and the 2020 "refugee crisis" can be considered as the fourth period. While the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in 2011, was initially a rebellion against authoritarian regimes, it resulted in civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, leading to the displacement of millions of people and mass migration movements. Millions of asylum seekers fleeing internal conflict and turmoil, as well as hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking a better life, have flocked to the EU countries.

The fact that most asylum seekers and migrants try to enter the EU irregularly raises concerns about internal security in EU society as well as societal security. In this sense, quantitatively revealing the dimensions of irregular migration that EU member states have faced in recent years is extremely important to analyse the effects of migration on the societal security of the EU. When the irregular migrants in the EU Member States from 2011 to 2021 are considered, the following table comes to the fore.

**Table 1:** Irregular Migrants in EU Member States (1x000)

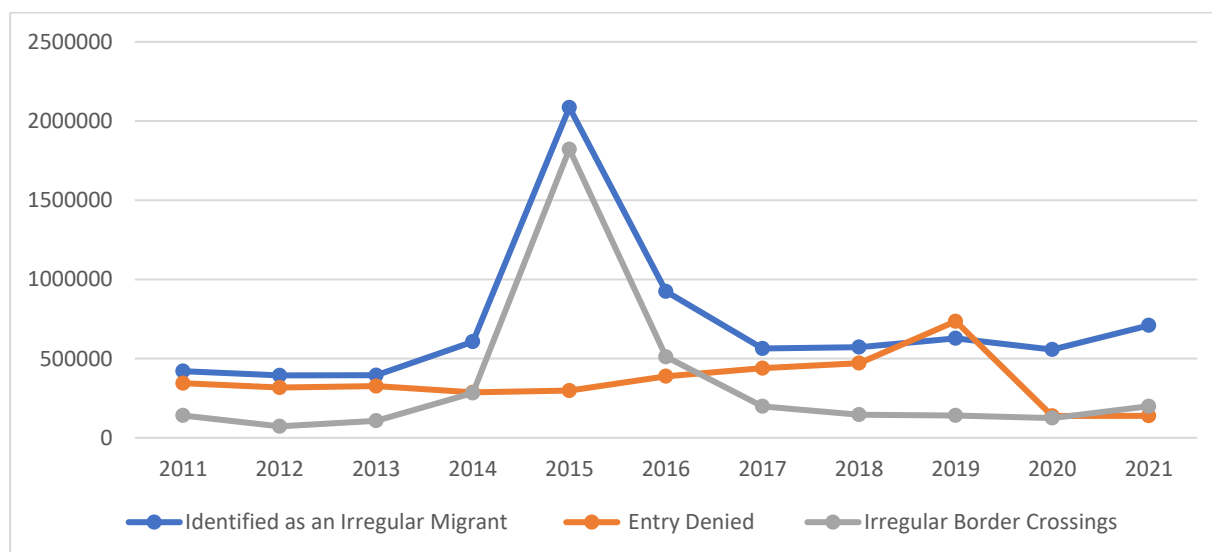
YEARS	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Identified as an Irregular Migrants	420	394	394	606	2.085	924	563	572	627	557	709
Entry Denied	344	317	326	286	297	388	439	471	735	137	139
Irregular Border Crossings	140	72	107	282	1.822	511	198	145	140	124	199
<b>SUM</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>783</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>1.176</b>	<b>4.205</b>	<b>1.823</b>	<b>1.201</b>	<b>1.189</b>	<b>1.504</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>1.048</b>

Source: Eurostat and Frontex<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The table has been edited by the author using EUROSTAT and FRONTEX data.

We can graphically show the number of migrants who are detected as irregular migrants in EU member states, who are denied entry for distinct reasons when they want to enter, and who are caught trying to enter the EU countries irregularly through the EU's Sea and land borders as follows.

**Chart 1:** Irregular Migrants in EU Member States



Source: Eurostat and Frontex

Migrants considered to be irregular migrants under the national laws of EU member states followed a horizontal graph until 2015 but showed a sudden jump in 2015. Irregular migrants are defined as migrants who are found to have entered the country outside the legal border gates or with a false document, and migrants who have entered legally but have subsequently become irregular migrants by exceeding the visa or residence period. However, these statistics only cover irregular migrants who have been apprehended or otherwise identified by national immigration authorities. It is therefore not a measure of the total number of irregular migrants in the member states.

The migrants who are denied entry consist of migrants who come to the external borders of the EU by land, sea, or air border crossing and are not allowed to enter the Schengen area because they do not have a valid travel document or visa. It is seen that these migrants are relatively horizontal and do not show a significant deviation from 2011 to 2018. Although in 2019 entry denied began with a rise, in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic denied substantially reduced.

The number of migrants trying to enter EU member states irregularly is in line with the number of migrants detected as irregular in EU member states. These numbers, which did not change significantly until 2015, increased nearly fivefold due to “the refugee crisis” in 2015. Irregular border crossings were the highest in 2015. In 2016, irregular border crossings decreased to the almost same level as the numbers in 2014, and after the EU-Turkey statement that came into force in March 2016, Turkey increased its maritime and land border security and accepted the return of irregular migrants from Greece. The statement largely removed the incentive for migrants to take the Eastern Mediterranean route to the EU.

Another empirical data that we will examine when considering the effects of migration on the societal security of the EU is the density of legal migrants and refugees in EU member states. As mentioned earlier, Waever put societal security concerning migration that causes the local population to decrease (2008). In this sense, the amount of migrant population in EU member states and the ratio of migrant population to the local population are major changes. According to the data compiled from the reports published by the United Nations in five-year periods, the migrant and refugee population of the EU member states from 1990 to 2020 and the ratio of this population to the total population are shown as follow.

**Table 2:** Population Dynamics of EU Member States (1X000)<sup>5</sup>

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020
Total Population	476.655	482.798	485.782	494.504	502.879	508.556	513.137
Immigrant Population	27.346	30.859	34.798	42.207	49.635	52.911	64.321
Refugees (Including Asylum Seekers)	1.258	2.187	1.776	1.589	1.526	2.278	3.618
The ratio of Migrant Population to Total Population, Including Refugees	6%	6.8%	7.5%	8.8%	10%	10,8%	11.3%

Source: International Migration Stock 2020<sup>6</sup>

The total population of the EU member states increased by around 37 million from 1990 to 2020. In this period, the immigrant population increased by the same amount, 37 million, and the refugee population increased by 2 million. The ratio of immigrant population to total population increased almost double, from 6% in 1990 to 11.3% in 2020. Considering the fertility rate of the local population in EU member countries, it can easily be said that the population increase is due to immigrants and refugees. On the other hand, the above statistics do not include immigrants who have obtained EU citizenship, and it is a known fact that thousands of migrants who have obtained citizenship live in the EU member states. Therefore, it can be argued that the migrant population in EU member states is much higher than the figures in the table. Although immigrants who obtain EU citizenship are not “other” by law, they are sociologically and culturally described as “other” in society.

### 2.1. Securitization of Migration in the EU

The securitization process involves three crucial rhetorical stages. First, the issue to be securitized, is typically initiated by securitizing actors who are often political elites. This is initially introduced through speech acts in the political arena and then onto the security agenda. In the second stage, to address the existential threat posed to the referent object by this issue, actors demand the use of extraordinary measures. In the final stage, the extraordinary measures taken to protect the threatened referent object are expected to be accepted by the audience. If these measures are accepted by the audience, they become legitimized, and the securitization process successfully concludes.

On the other hand, the evolving and deepening concept of security has led to a new understanding of security, shifting from a state-centric perspective to an individual and community-centric one. The concept of migration has transformed from a societal and socio-economic issue into a security concern. In this regard, migration has begun to be presented as a threat to the survival of the state, with the argument that it disrupts the social identity, economic integrity, and internal security of countries (Ozcan, 2010: 329-330). Huysmans stated that migration is perceived as a threat to a country’s internal security, its economy, cultural identity, and the welfare state (Huysmans, 2006: 64). Particularly after the 9/11 attacks, a link has been established between migration and terrorism, sparking debates on the need for stricter border controls and more stringent asylum and visa policies. Furthermore, the topic of migration has been intertwined with transnational crimes and framed within a negative narrative. The increasing incidence of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and economic crises have led to internal security becoming increasingly prominent on countries’ agendas. In the EU countries where

<sup>5</sup> The comparison was made over 28 member countries including United Kingdom in order to make a better comparison.

<sup>6</sup> The table has been edited by the author using United Nations Migration Statistics.



internal border controls have been removed, dealing with such new threats that threaten internal security can become quite challenging (Duke & Ojanen, 2006: 478).

Apart from internal security, another reference object claimed to be threatened by migration is cultural identity. The phenomenon of migration is on the rise day by day, and the population structures of the countries involved in migration are being affected by this increase. Immigrants with different languages, different traditions, and different beliefs are interacting with the local community. This interaction and cultural differences such as language, religion, traditions, and customs are perceived as a threat because they damage social homogeneity, leading to immigrants being seen as threats.

Demographic changes caused by migration may pose a security threat to countries. When security is associated with demographic structure, the concept of societal and cultural security comes to the fore (Ağır, 2014: 460). The increase in the number of immigrants in society causes concerns that the identity and culture of these immigrants will suppress the identity of the local people, cause their traditions to change, and threaten their cultural assets. The issue of migration, therefore, is perceived as a threat to state security in terms of societal security. Societies: culture, language, religion, national identity, and traditions are shown to protect and ensure their sustainability (Papadopoulos, 2011: 455-456).

In the process of securitizing migration, it is observed that far-right political parties have come to the forefront as key securitization actors in the EU member states. Particularly from the 2000s onwards, irregular migration and refugee issues have entered the agendas of far-right political parties and have been brought into electoral campaigns. Political party leaders, within the framework of their election strategies, have started incorporating discourses that suggest migrants cause socio-economic problems and are not conducive to integration into their election campaigns. To effectively combat irregular migration, it is increasingly evident that countries are enhancing their border controls, standardizing deportation procedures across all EU countries, implementing additional measures to better protect external borders, and allocating more funds from their budgets (Sever & Sever, 2013: 91-82).

In this context, debates arise as to whether migration poses a threat to the culture, religion, language, and traditions of the EU or whether migration is perceived as a threat to EU society. These debates range from the idea that migration challenges the integrity of society and cultural homogeneity to the promotion of multiculturalism; it takes place on a variety of ideological grounds, ranging from preserving national traditions to the need to preserve Western Civilization as a whole. However, the first thing that comes to mind is the issue of cultural identity (Huysmans, 2006: 73). If cultural identity is kept on the agenda either politically or sociologically, it is seen that migration can also be associated with Europeanness, nationalism, multiculturalism, xenophobia, and racism (Huysmans, 2000: 762-763).

On the other hand, while forming their identities, societies feed on unifying elements such as religion, language, common history, and future ideals, as well as the differences of communities that are not like them and are characterized as other. The “other” is needed for society to maintain its identity and for identity to be a unifying force. In this sense, migrants are perceived as “other” in the society they migrate for having diverse cultural characteristics such as language or religion.

The rapid increase in migrants in both regular and irregular status in the EU member states has led to the redefinition of migration-oriented issues in the EU. The fact that the migrants who came to the EU during the 2015 “Refugee Crisis” were expressed in millions raised the security concerns in the EU to the highest level. Also, immigrants involved in crimes such as terrorism, theft, fraud, and sexual assault are much more visible in the media which reinforces the perception that migrants disrupt public order (Castles & Miller, 2008: 144).

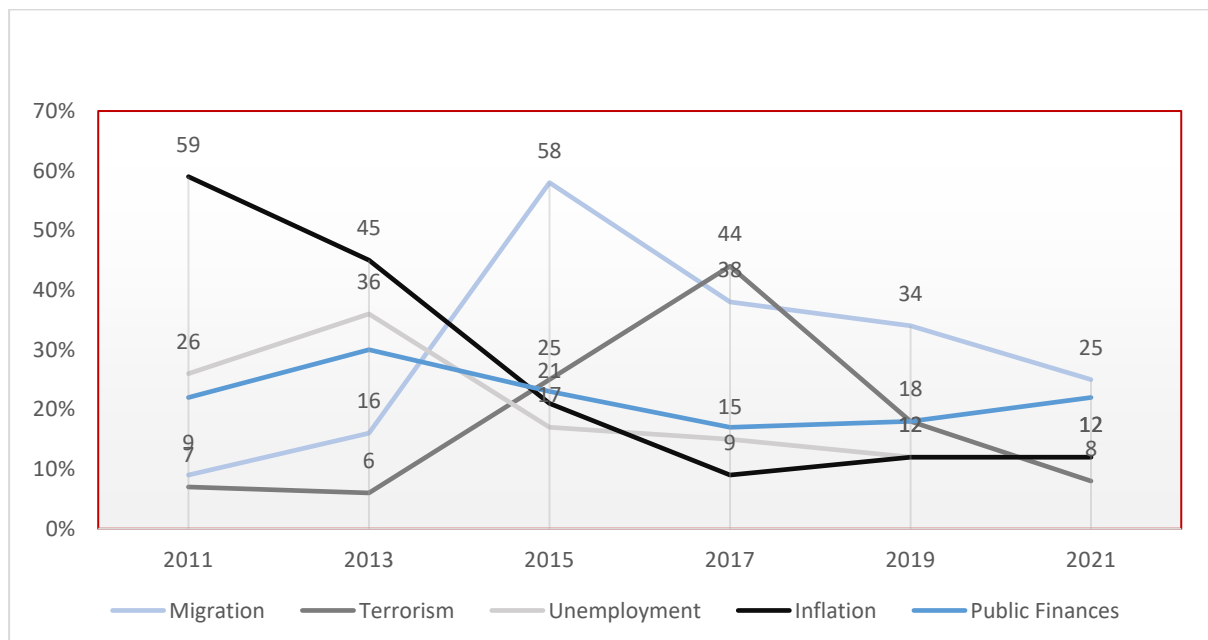
In the EU, some political actors like French Far-right political leader Marine Le Pen and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán have emphasized combating irregular migration and tightening border controls as the solution to overcome the problems associated with migration (Mandacı and Özerim, 284

2013, 113: Breitbart, 2015). Measures aimed at preventing the entry of irregular migrants into the EU have been the subject of discussion. Within these discussions, the emergency and extraordinary measures proposed have faced criticism for sidelining and even disregarding universal human and refugee rights, leading to migrant tragedies in the Mediterranean due to restrictive migration policies. Measures taken to combat irregular migration have been criticized both within the EU and by civil society organizations, human rights activists, and various political parties outside the EU, with allegations that these measures violate the fundamental human right to life (Statewatch, 2023). At this juncture, actors have utilized the propositions of securitization theory to legitimize the emergency and extraordinary measures they have taken in the context of combating irregular migration in international public opinion (Huysmans, 2000). In this context, the securitization areas have revolved around combating irregular migration and tightening border controls, making discussions on preventing the entry of irregular migrants into the EU a matter of importance.

In other words, securitization theory has played a pivotal role in justifying actions taken in response to irregular migration policies, even when they occasionally clash with EU values and international human rights agreements, both within the EU and on the global stage. To gauge the effectiveness of these efforts, it is essential to evaluate them within the framework of securitization. For a successful securitization process, the intended audience must recognize the stated issue as a security concern and agree to the extraordinary measures proposed. Therefore, the most critical stage in the securitization process is the persuasion of the intended audience. It is the intended audience, not the actor pushing for the securitization (Buzan et al., 1998: 28).

In this context, the question arises as to whether migration has been successfully securitized at the EU level, particularly concerning societal security. Questionnaires conducted in EU member states offer important clues about whether migration threatens the societal security of the EU or whether there is a threat perception in society. Therefore, analysing the survey results is particularly important to find an answer to the research question of our study. In this sense, we analysed the Standard Eurobarometer questionnaires prepared by the EU Commission.

**Chart 3:** What Do You Think Are the Two Most Important Problems Facing the EU?



Source: Eurobarometer 84, 87 and 91<sup>7</sup>

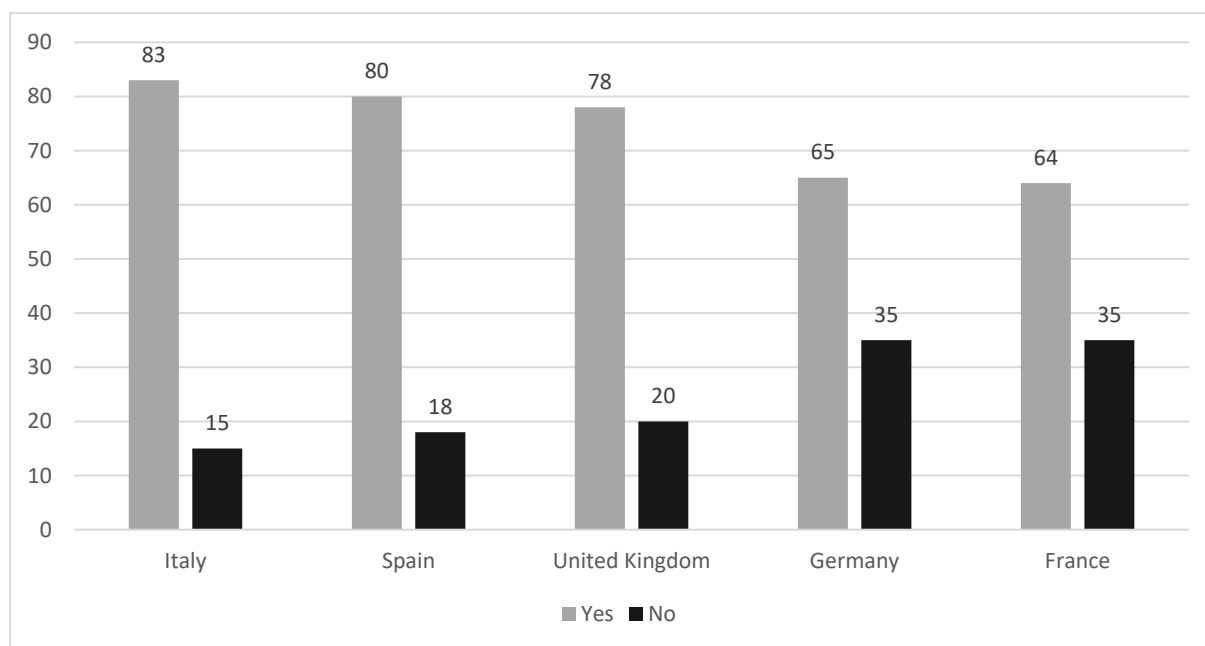
<sup>7</sup> The Standard Eurobarometer, the European Commission’s flagship public opinion survey, is conducted semi-annually to track significant trends relevant to the European Union as a whole, the priorities of the European Commission, and contemporary socio-political events. This survey allows for the analysis of long-term shifts in public attitudes related to

In the questionnaires conducted to measure public concerns at the EU level, the factors perceived as threats are highlighted. In the graph above shows that, when asked in the questionnaire conducted in 2011 “What do you think are the two most important problems facing the EU?”, 59% of the participants said inflation. With the effects of the 2008 economic crisis gradually disappearing, this rate began to decrease steadily to 58% in 2011 and has shown a steady trend after this date. By 2021, the inflation rate fell to 12%, falling to the third place among the main problems.

While migration, which ranked 4th among the main problems faced by the EU in 2011 with 9%, after the Arab Spring the migration pressure faced has led to an increase in this rate up to 2015. In 2015, migrants increased by 49 points compared to 2010 and rose to first place among the main problems facing the EU with a rate of 58%. The refugee crisis that occurred in 2015 made itself felt with the extraordinary increase in the survey results conducted in the same year. It is important to note that migration movement to the EU has slowed dramatically since its highs during the 2015 refugee crisis.

Terrorism, which ranked 5th among the main problems with a rate of 7% in 2011, showed a tendency to decrease in 2013 and followed an increasing graph after 2013. The terrorist threat, which increased to 25% in 2015, ranked second with a rate of 38% in 2017. That is to say, the increasing amount of migration has brought with it the threat of terrorism.

**Chart 4:** Should Stricter Measures Be Taken for Migration Control?



Source: PEAW Research Center<sup>8</sup>

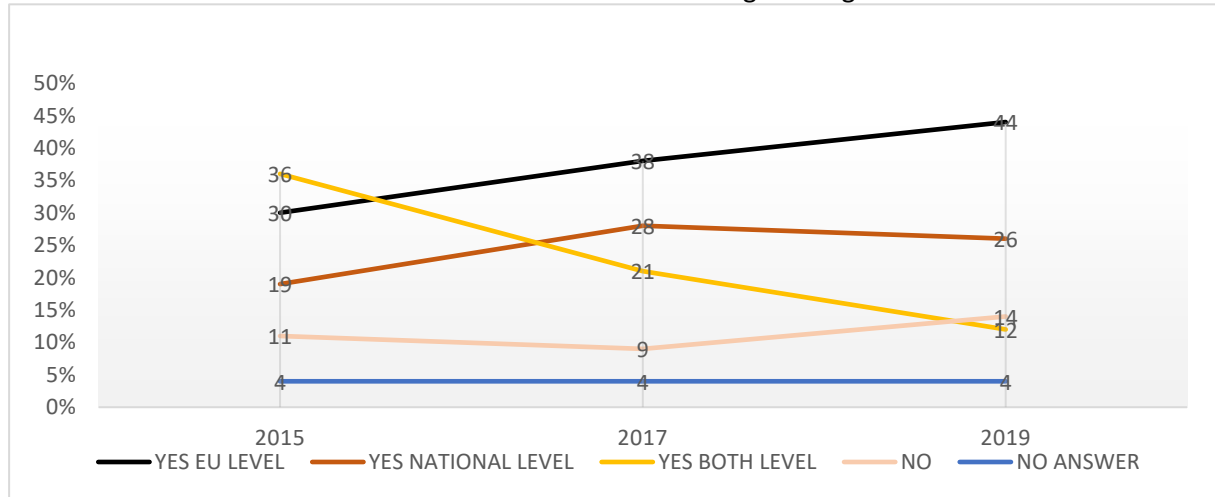
A survey conducted by the PEW Research Centre in the Autumn of 2009 in the EU’s leading countries Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom asked the question: “Should stricter

European affairs. Standard Eurobarometer surveys are typically carried out through face-to-face interviews across all EU Member States and select additional countries and territories. These surveys primarily focus on citizens’ perceptions and expectations regarding EU actions and the primary challenges confronting the Union, including topics such as energy, education, industry, society, culture, and demography.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. The survey took place from August 27 to September 24, 2009, and involved 14,760 respondents in various countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. In each country, interviews were carried out in the local languages with representative samples of the adult population. The survey reexamined many key questions like Democratic Values, Nationalism, Economic Values and Religiosity and the Role of Religion included in the “Opinions of Ethnic and Religious Minorities” survey.

measures be taken to control migration?” As can be seen from the ratios in the graph below, a considerable number of participants answered “yes” to this question. Given the migration “burden” faced by Italy, it is not surprising that the Italian public is overwhelmingly in favour of tighter restrictions on migrants.

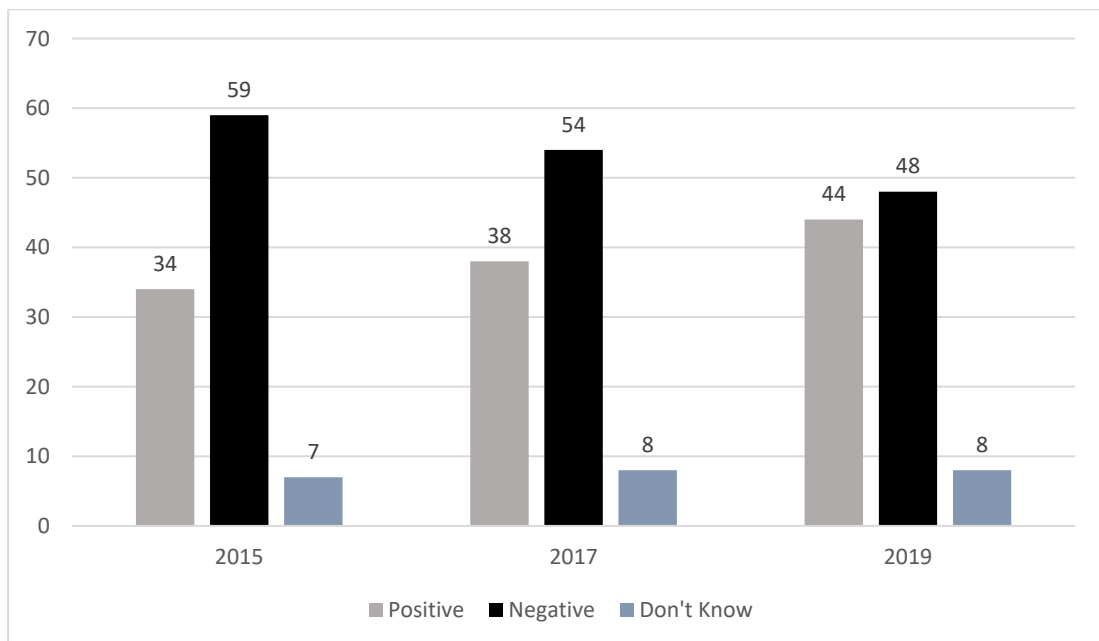
**Chart 5:** Should Additional Measures Be Taken to Combat Irregular Migrants from Outside the EU?



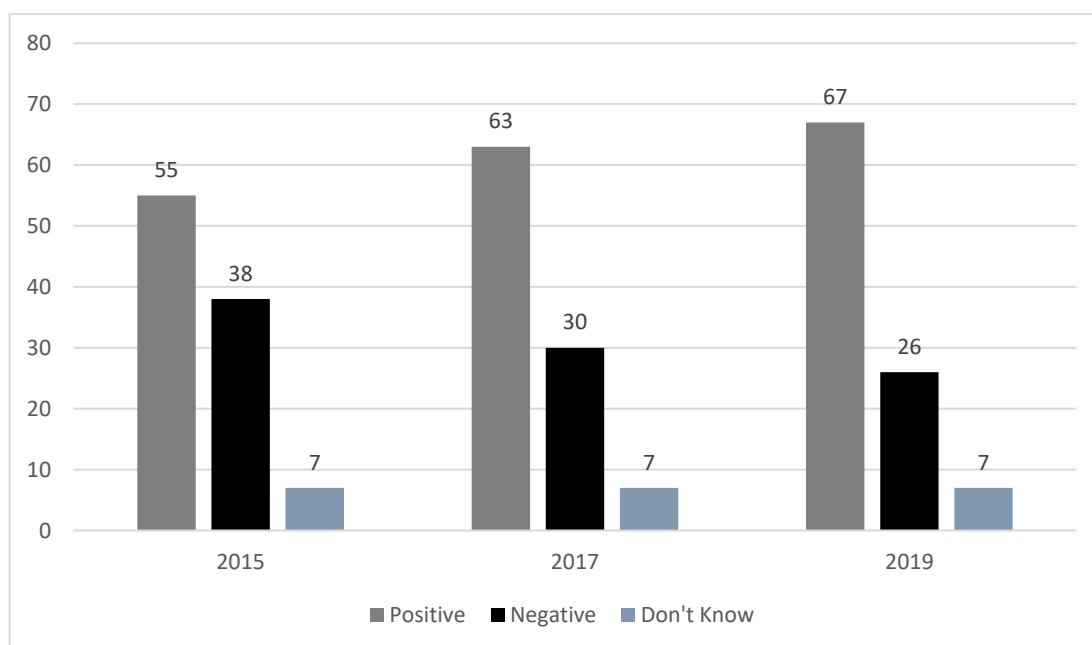
Source: Eurobarometer 84, 87 and 91

On the other hand, according to the Standard Eurobarometer surveys, the participants were asked the question, “Do you think that additional measures should be taken to combat irregular migrants from outside the EU?” To compare the answers, it is better to glance at surveys conducted in 2015, 2017, and 2019. While 30% of the participants expressed the opinion that additional measures should be taken at the EU level in 2015, this rate increased to 44% in 2019. On the other hand, both the EU and national level rates decreased in 2019. These rates show us that the migration problem is an EU problem rather than a national one.

**Chart 6:** Does the Immigration of People from Outside the EU Evoke a Positive or Negative Feeling for You?



Source: Eurobarometer 84, 87 and 91

**Chart 7:** Does the Immigration of People from The Other Eu Member States Evoke A Positive or Negative Feeling for You?

Source: (Eurobarometer 84, 87 and 91)

To answer our research question, we should analyse the impact of migration on the EU society. In other words, EU society's feelings about migrants from outside and inside the EU can give us a prediction of whether immigrants are perceived as a threat to societal security. The answers given to the question of how migration to the EU feels is analysed with the results above. According to the 2015 Standard Eurobarometer survey, 55% of respondents held a positive view of migration within the EU, while 38% had a negative perspective. However, a contrasting approach was observed concerning migration from outside the EU, with 34% expressing a positive opinion and 59% expressing a negative one. Even though the negative perception of immigration from outside the EU has somewhat decreased in the subsequent years, it remains relatively high when compared to immigration from within the EU.

Although the above survey results do not specifically reveal the threat perceptions towards the field of societal security, migration creates a largely negative feeling in EU society, and demands for stricter measures to control migration are remarkable. On the other hand, when the results of the last two surveys are analysed, it is possible to claim that migration is perceived as a threat to societal security. It shows that the EU society, which has the same religious beliefs and similar cultural characteristics, has a negative feeling towards immigrants coming from outside the EU at a rate of 59%. Another remarkable result is the question "Should additional measures be taken to combat irregular migrants from outside the EU?" A large number of participants answered yes to this question.

In this process, EU countries have developed several policies for migrants to manage this perception in society, to protect their societal security, and to reinforce the awareness of Europeanness in society. These policies can be listed as measures to restrict legal migration opportunities and activities for migrants in the country. Assimilation and integration by differentiation come to the fore as the remarkable policies of this period.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, security concerns about migrants and Muslims have increased both in EU member states and at the EU level. Anti-terror laws have been enacted or existing laws have been renewed to introduce tighter security measures. Also, during this period, additional provisions were introduced to protect public order and security in both national laws and Community draft laws on issues such as labour migration, family reunification, and the status of regular migrants. In addition,

the autonomous decision-making powers of the ministries responsible for internal affairs or internal security have been upgraded and increasingly restrictive regulations on migration are at stake for the EU member states (Brouwer, 2003: 299-324).

Assimilation policies are historically the first and sociologically the most natural cultural identity protection policies. However, these policies are often criticized, especially by liberal thinkers, for destroying multiculturalism and forcing immigrants to adopt the cultural characteristics of the local population (Kaya, 2009). On the other hand, the authors (Back, et al., 2002: 445–54). underline the failure of multiculturalism and see it as a national project in which the state tries to retransform its assimilation and exclusion policies within the borders of the nation-state (Mitchell, 2004: 645). According to them, the 9/11 attacks and the bombings in Spain and the United Kingdom mean that multiculturalism for migrants has ended in a fiasco on many fronts, and the main problem stems from the inability of migrants to integrate into the host society (Joppke, 2004: 237-257).

In this context, the decisions taken against immigrants in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany are quite remarkable. In France, new laws have come into force banning Muslim clothing such as veils, and headscarves, and religious clothing and symbols such as Jewish kippahs. Britain has banned polygamy, female genital mutilation, or arranged marriages specific to immigrants, considering the rising anti-immigrant voices (Phillips & Saharso, 2008: 291). The German Federal Court ruled that the circumcision of boys, traditionally performed by Jewish and Muslim communities for religious reasons, harmed the bodily integrity of children. The Court ruled that circumcision should only be performed when there was a medical necessity (CNN Turk, 2012).

Another policy pursued by the EU within the framework of the protection of cultural identity is integration policies. This policy is supported by both academics (Wolleggem, 2020), and non-governmental organizations and aims to integrate migrants into the host society without posing a threat to cultural identity. These policies also emphasize that multiculturalism should be encouraged to ensure respect for diverse cultures.

The main question here is how the cultural differences of the migrants of the host countries will affect the social cohesion of the country and the preservation of liberal values. Although the social and cultural adaptation of migrants to the local community is the main goal, decision-makers turn to different practices in terms of how to achieve this goal (Göksel, 2018: 4). Some countries, such as the Netherlands, have implemented a series of emergency action plans, such as opening integration courses in line with language courses, and have started to require legal immigrants to the Netherlands to attend these courses as a prerequisite (Heer, 2004: 177).

The path to integration requires participation in the social, economic, and political systems of the host country. In this context, immigrants who choose voluntary integration are welcomed if, as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said, they internalize the values of the host society, otherwise, they are perceived as rejecting liberal democratic norms. They may face revocation of their citizenship and legal right of residence and, in extreme cases, sanctions of detention, denaturalization, and deportation (Triadafilopoulos, 2011: 862).

Despite such sanctions, several reward tools are also used for integration policies. Immigrants are allowed to participate in political activities through citizenship, and access to educational institutions or housing resources is ensured at all levels, providing access to all the rights of the host community.

### **3. Conclusion**

The definition and scope of the security concept are constantly changing. In the face of new dynamics that threaten individuals, society, the state, or the international system, new measures are being taken to protect the existence of actors. According to the traditional understanding of security, the reference object of security was the state, and the threats to the state originate from other states through military capacities. After the Cold War, this understanding lost its importance and the new phenomena that emerged with the effect of globalization revealed new threats to the security of the

individual and society as well as the state. In this sense, irregular migrations, terrorism, cross-border crimes, environmental disasters, climate change, and epidemic diseases have been included in the security realm. The concept of societal security has gained importance, especially after the 1990s due to the fact that emerging new threats directly affect individuals and societies. Societal security, in its broadest form, encompasses the identity, religion, common culture, national tradition, and related national integrity that make up societies and as the Copenhagen School expresses, societal security is in relation to three categories of threat, whereas the one is migration.

After World War II, there were intensive migrations to EU member states and the rate of immigrant population increased day by day in the general population, where some say the population increase in the EU is mainly related to migrants as newcomers. The mass migrations to the EU caused by the Arab Spring, eventually have become the primary agenda of the EU politics, and questions about whether migration threatens the EU's societal security have risen radically. In the context of these discussions, the effects of migration on the societal security of the EU were discussed in this paper. Based on Weaver's approach, official reports were used to reveal the density of regular and irregular migrants in EU member states. By using the results of surveys conducted periodically in EU member states, the attitude of EU society towards migration and migrants was measured. According to the findings obtained in this sense, migration in EU society constitutes a largely negative feeling and increasing demands for stricter measures to control migration. Therefore, it is possible to say that there is a strong perception in EU society that migration threatens the societal security of the EU.

The EU's perception of societal security as a threat has provided EU countries with the opportunity to utilize more extensive approaches in their efforts to address irregular migration. In simpler terms, the exceptional measures implemented in irregular migration policies have gained legitimacy in the eyes of the public, aligning with the principles of securitization theory. For example, border controls have been tightened to prevent irregular migrants from entering EU territory. Assimilation and integration policies by differentiation can also be listed as prominent policies to manage societal security perception.

Although assimilation policies are the first policies that come to mind, they can be harmful to the cultural identity of immigrants as they contain coercive tools. Therefore, assimilation policies are often criticized by scholars and non-governmental organizations. Integration policies, on the other hand, have the potential to protect the cultural identity of migrants. Successful integration policies ensure that migrants are integrated into the local community while preserving their cultural characters. Therefore, EU political elites should prioritize policies that will ensure the social and cultural adaptation of migrants to local society to manage the threat perception towards migrants. In this way, the EU can acquire instruments that can prevent migrants from being perceived as a threat to societal security without undermining the fundamental values it stands for.

#### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

#### **Authors Contribution Statement**

The contribution of the article is 50% of the first author, and 50% of the second author.

#### **Competing interest**

The author declares no competing interests.

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