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The Resurrection of Borders Inside of the Schengen Area and its Media Representations

Ondřej Elbel *

The bordering processes inside of the Schengen Area are traditionally under the scrutiny of border studies scholars. The European Union has been repeatedly displayed as a laboratory for a free cross-border movement, often with synonyms like an ostensibly borderless area (Scott 2012). This so-called Schengen culture (Zaiotti 2011) developed due to intensifying cross-border contact and integration between EU member states. However, in the decade between 2010 and 2020 this Schengen culture has been repeatedly challenged by the geopolitical crises and nationalistic political narratives and decisions. This study concentrates on this debate about borders in the selected European news. The analysis of news articles from six newspapers (Mladá fronta, Hospodářské noviny, Le Figaro, Le Monde, Der Standard, and Die Presse) shows how the context of the border debate evolved under the impact of migration crises and coronavirus crisis. Throughout the decade of the 2010s, this study witnesses the gradual securitization of borders inside of the EU and illustrates how the symbolic language and various narratives contributed to this development.¹

Introduction

To close the border. By the beginning of the 21st century, such a step looked like an old-fashioned remnant of earlier geopolitical time periods. That held true, especially in the Schengen Area which has been proud of its ostensibly borderless regime. However, some years later, borders paved their way back to the news and made headlines once again, even inside the European Union. This study explores this development which accompanied a set of various political crises of the 2010s. The question of the resurrection of border checks was typically elicited in the context of immigration into the EU, raised primarily in 2011 and 2015.

This study argues that the context of the “border debate” in the 2010s inside of the EU was shaped by three important situations that were each labelled as a crisis. In the first case, the trigger was the migration from Tunisia at the outset of the Arab Uprising. At that time, France decided to renew border checks with Italy for a very limited amount of time (Colombeau 2019) while four years later, the main migratory route led from Syria and Afghanistan through Greece and the Balkans. In the summer of 2015, the states, mainly in Central Europe, were adopting re-bordering strategies in a domino effect (Kriesi et al. 2021) to reduce the flow of migration. The third scope of time under scrutiny is the

* **Ondřej Elbel**, PhD Candidate, Department of Human Geography and Regional Development, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic. Email: ondrej.elbel@osu.cz ORCID: [0000-0001-6704-5500](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6704-5500)

spring of 2020 when many states adopted protective measures aimed at decelerating the spread of the COVID-19 illness (Böhm 2020; Brunet-Jailly 2022; Rufi et al. 2020). For the rapid closures of borders in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, Medeiros et al. (2021) introduced the term *covidfencing*. The uniqueness of this trend did not consist only in the rush of nation-states during the reintroduction of border checks but also in the extent of the control. Passage through some border checks was even forbidden.

Often, the loudspeakers of border control were politicians promoting nationalistic and xenophobic campaigns against foreigners. It is therefore important to study how the debate on borders looked when EU member states implemented such measures. The special focus will be given to rhetorical justifications for the sudden resurrection of borders inside of the Schengen Area. As the Schengen Acquis defines the conditions for the temporary reintroduction of border controls, politicians have to justify their solutions to the voters. This is also how narratives about border measures become present in the news. As Prokkola (2009) emphasizes, these narratives are codes or tools that shape citizen perceptions of reality. The act of sharing these narratives means an engagement in the process of re-bordering or de-bordering (van Houtum 2005).

This paper is structured in the following way. First, two theoretical sections explore the connections between crises and their spatiality in relation to borders, with a focus on nationalist discourse. Then, the methods section presents critical discourse analysis as a tool that helps inspect narratives together with their contexts, also explaining the case selection and introducing the news media chosen for analysis. The findings section analyses and compares the selected news articles, leading to a discussion that identifies three major patterns of border media representation during crisis.

Border as Catalyst of Crises

A crisis may easily become an unprecedented geopolitical factor (Casaglia et al. 2020). Defined as a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering (Cambridge Dictionary 2020), crises are unanticipated challenges that shock a polity. Such shocks typically reveal vulnerabilities, risks, or hidden cleavages in societies and may provoke new types of crises (Stavrakakis & Katsampekis 2020). Due to the wide impact of crises, such events are very often regarded as highly newsworthy (An & Gower 2009). Journalists, therefore, show a high interest in crises and thereby become involved in the construction of crises (Krzyżanowski 2019; Kepplinger & Roth 1979). The term crisis may serve as a catchphrase or self-standing news frame (Vincze 2014). The construction of crisis is also a prominent characteristic of populist narratives (Stavrakakis et al. 2018; Moffitt 2015; Pappas & Kriesi

2015). As can be seen, both news media and politicians use crisis narratives in public discourse and such choice of words may not be without consequences. As Altheide (2018) shows, one of the elicited outcomes of the construction of crisis may be fear.

Crises also have their spatial dimension. They can initiate a debate about the sovereignty of the nation-state over its territory (Brubaker 2020) or the delineation of *Us and Them* (Brambilla & Jones 2020). In the process of *othering* (Vollmer 2016), the delimitation of borders plays a crucial role (van Houtum & van Naerssen 2002). The experience of crises could spatialize fear (Brubaker 2020), undermine to some extent a belief in a free movement inside the EU (Newman 2003), provoke a defense of thick borders (Haselsberger 2014), and revive nationalist discourses (Bieber 2020).

When looking back to the second decade of the 21st century in the European Union, three major phenomena contextualized as crises can be detected: the *global financial crisis*, the *refugee crisis*, and the *COVID-19 crisis*. Each represents a complex set of fears, confusions, and disagreements. As such, they raised questions about policy implementation, identity, or further European integration. Also, they co-occurred with re-bordering tendencies inside of the Schengen Area whose members previously decided to abandon the mutual border controls. However, these crises led to the resurrection of borders that obtained new symbolic and spatial meanings as a result. Therefore, it is a timely question to inspect the possible connections between the crises and the re-bordering. Wassenberg (2020) labels it the "Schengen Crisis" and indicates the end of the myth of Europe without borders. This study aims to identify the representation of borders both in news media and in political discourse during these crises.

Borders and their discursive representations

The process of border construction is continuous, and Scott (2012) differentiates four categories of bordering: discursive (political and social framings), practical (material and substantive areas), perceptual (group/individual), and representational (cultural, media-generated images). The geopolitical discourse is set both by politicians and media (Kolossoff 2005) who not only speak about borders but also create new layers of representations to them which can be emotionally tuned (Zhurzhenko 2010).

In border zones, a violent act of exclusion or mobilizing threat has often materialized (Brambilla & Jones 2020). Those *fields of security* (Bigo 2003) are typically elicited in the context of migration (Vaughan-Williams 2009), criminality (Havlíček & Klečková 2018), citizenship (Parker 2012), or geopolitical distancing (Lindberg & Borrelli 2019). Borders play an inherent role in the process of self-defining (Paasi 2001). Specifically, in the context of the European Union, a look into

discursive bordering practices performed by European news media shows us which interests are represented in the debate and who is speaking on behalf of EU citizens. Politicians form an important category of sources for discourse analysis. Other sources include local residents of borderlands, people in motion (e.g., refugees, cross-border commuters), and experts (social scientists, NGO staff, EU-institution representatives). The analysis focused on the diffusion of border frames on the EU level suggested by Casaglia et al. (2020) may shed new light on the meaning of European borders in the 21st century and the impact of bordering processes performed by the EU in the last decade.

Two major branches of argumentation about the border regime inside of the EU emerge: a narrative of integration and a narrative of security. These categories were initially defined by Zhurzhenko (2010) in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian border but seem to be working in the EU context as well, because they stem from the dual interpretation of borders; either understood as bridge or barrier (Zhurzhenko 2010).

In the narrative of integration inside of the EU, themes like cooperation, mutual contact, togetherness, and freedom of movement may be elicited. In this logic, the experience of common life is stronger than the temporary crisis. Despite the current challenges, the future of the EU lies in this model. The opposite camp uses the discourse of danger, mentioning possible threats that can result from cross-border mobility (e.g., criminality, diseases, illegal migrants). Those who preach the securitization of EU border regimes contribute to the 'us vs. them' dimension of borders and steadily bring attention to the negative phenomena that can hide behind the border. However, this initial categorization of border narratives needs to be broadened and diversified. The overall picture of borders in media may be much more colorful than just dualistic. Also, both main narratives acquire different characteristics according to the particular crisis.

Methodology and Research Question

This article aims to analyze the shifting meanings of borders, the metaphors, and the symbols employed in the discourse about borders. As the timeframe for this study is ten years, it is possible to investigate how the sense-making about borders evolved in time. Therefore, the study of context and basic unsaid presumptions are of key importance (Gee 2010). Applying the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA), the institutional and sociocultural contexts can be taken into account (Carvalho 2008). Context matters because one word may acquire manifold meanings (Gee 2010). Each word stems from meaning resources and has meaning potential (Gee 2014). The news audience assigns the information to their previous experience and knowledge, and mass media contributes to the construction of reality (Couldry & Hepp 2018).

The data analysis of each article consisted of its categorization (news/opinion). Special emphasis was put on metaphorical language about borders or the decision to re-introduce border checks. Soon, a few important containers of meanings emerged according to their stance towards the border measures adopted by the state inside of the Schengen Area. The media representations of borders diverged according to positive, negative, or neutral evaluations of the reintroduction of border checks. The justifications for border closures were also important basins for discourse analysis of different argumentations. A critical approach requires reflecting and contrasting political narratives and putting them into context.

Research question: *How was the resurrection of borders in the 2010s inside of the Schengen Area represented in the news media and how did it develop over time?*

To answer this question, this study looks into European media discourses in times of crises related to the borders inside of the Schengen Area. This recognizes that news media play an important role in bordering processes (Scott 2012). During the pilot phase of this research, the news archive of the French newspaper *Le Monde* was consulted to identify the moments of border resurrection inside the Schengen Area between 2010 and 2020. Although the debate about borders was present continuously in news reporting (with special emphasis during some election campaigns), three moments of the specific resurrection of borders emerged from the data: in 2011 and 2015 the trigger was migration; in 2020 the re-bordering was related to COVID-19.

Regarding the content analysis of media, three countries were selected: France, Austria, and Czechia. Each represents another language and another context of relation to the EU. France belongs to the group of founding members of the EU; Austria entered the European integration path in the 1990s, while Czechia joined the EU together with other post-communist countries during the Eastern Enlargement in 2004. For each country, two newspapers were put under scrutiny. Six selected news titles can be divided into two categories: the more conservative profile (*Le Figaro* for France, *Die Presse* for Austria, and *Mladá Fronta DNES* for Czechia) and the more liberal profile (*Le Monde* for France, *Der Standard* for Austria, and *Hospodářské noviny* for Czechia). This sorting reflects Paasi's (1998) consideration of borders as important markers of identity that vary according to the ideological background. The news articles were accessible through media archives (Anopress database for Czechia, WISO-Net for Austria) and personal subscriptions (www.lemonde.fr, www.lefigaro.fr). In these databases, suitable articles were identified through the following filters. Firstly, publication dates were confined to three periods: March 1st through June 30th of 2011, September 1st through December 31st of 2015, and March 1st

through June 30th of 2020. Secondly, the search query had to contain keywords for this study ('borders', 'Schengen', 'controls', 'close') and their combinations. The list of results was then inspected manually to discard non-related articles and articles about borders in different territorial contexts (like external borders of Schengen Area, other continents). The focus was put on opinion articles, longer news reports, columns, and editorials about border closures inside of the Schengen Area. Therefore, articles shorter than 200 words were discarded to filter out short notices and briefings. In the end, dozens of articles passed this process, and their numbers indicated in Table 1 according to period of time. The selected quotes were later manually translated into English by author.

Table 1. Number of articles included by publication and year.
 Table prepared by author.

Publication	2011	2015	2020
<i>Le Monde (FR)</i>	59	46	49
<i>Le Figaro (FR)</i>	47	60	46
<i>Der Standard (AT)</i>	36	50	80
<i>Die Presse (AT)</i>	38	108	89
<i>Mladá fronta DNES (CZ)</i>	8	82	52
<i>Hospodářské noviny (CZ)</i>	6	66	69

Findings

Even though the borders inside of the Schengen Area remained fixed and unchanged in their territoriality during the selected time period, the meanings and the debate about borders became dynamic.

2011—Revival of Border Debate

Analysis of the first selected period of border debate shows that neither migration nor borders were the most prominent news media topic in 2011. At that time, news stories about crisis were more focused on the global financial crash and the Eurozone crisis. As this opinion article from *Le Monde* shows, migration from North Africa or the Middle East was debated as topic number two. Number one concerned issues of monetary union. For example; "The second motive of disturbance, the refugee wave from the Arab words, gives place to the questioning of the Schengen Agreement that guarantees a free circulation of people between signatory countries" (*Le Monde*, May 25, 2011).

Nevertheless, the quarrel about borders between French and Italian politicians became an important agenda-setter that pointed to the limits of Schengen border culture. The turning point consisted in the acknowledgment that some EU-member countries gave priority to the short-term political profit of their leaders at the expense of mutual solidarity. This was reflected

in one of the headlines in *Le Monde*: "In Europe, a sad reality of selfish practice" (*LM*, May 13, 2011). A lack of solidarity and common coordinated policies during the Ventimiglia incident was perceived in *Le Monde* as a test for a European integration project: "What is at stake really, behind the scenes of migration towards Europe is a decline of European idea and construction" (*LM*, May 17, 2011).

The readership of *Le Figaro* could see quite a different picture, mainly in the opinion articles. There, illegal immigration was portrayed as a threat, and efforts to control the borders were seen as a constructive way of dealing with the problem: "The minister of interior, learning a lesson from the failure of Schengen, deals as he can with the absurdity of European rules to reintroduce the temporary controls at our borders (...). Would you prefer to open our doors to all the Tunisians...?" (*Le Figaro*, April 14, 2011). In other words, *Le Figaro* in these moments reused the political argumentation of Nicolas Sarkozy that borders are possible to be controlled and patrolled.

In the Austrian news media, the issue of the French-Italian dispute was followed as well. One of the reasons may be that Austria neighbors Italy, and the migration of Tunisians could affect Austria. Therefore, temporary stricter controls were set on the border. In the few days after the disruption of railway traffic at the French-Italian border, *Die Presse* started to debate the advantages and inconveniences of the Schengen Agreement: "The refugee flow challenges Schengen" (*Die Presse*, April 13, 2011).

The situation showed that the rules of the Schengen Agreement can be easily derailed by one state that stops fulfilling its responsibility to guard the external Schengen border. At that moment, freedom of movement may become risky, the op-eds in *Die Presse* warned. One month later, the reflection went a step further. The context of the debate ranged from the sheer critique of borderless Europe and discussions about the possible deployment of the army on the borders to the voices that assigned the "border-control" rhetoric to the populist parties that aim to renationalize the EU: "Europe in reverse gear to 27 national fortresses: The populists in the EU countries are not concerned with overcoming a refugee crisis, but rather with renationalizing politics" (*DP*, May 21, 2011). Overall, the debate was set for the future as the bigger migration waves were suggested by some: "The French-Italian dispute over 25,000 Tunisian refugees is currently dominating the news. The real problem for the Schengen area is Greece's inability to organize a functioning border protection" (*DP*, May 5, 2011).

The context of *the border debate* co-created by *Der Standard* journalists was quite different from the approach of *Die Presse*. *Der Standard* did not accept the narrative that the reintroduction of border controls

could be an effective solution to the problems of the Schengen countries. The re-bordering tendencies were seen as a toolkit that belonged to history and could have unpleasant consequences: "Citizens and politicians shout all too quickly: doors and windows are shut, gates close, and borders tight. That is a comprehensible reflex, a seemingly simple solution. So, after the formation of its nation-states, Europe has worked for centuries. Unfortunately, all too often with the fatal endings. As a result, conflicts and border violations were resolved with violence" (*Der Standard*, May 5, 2011).

According to the analytical texts in *Der Standard*, the violation of Schengen rules would mean a severe threat to the whole system of mobility inside of the area: «It is clear that after the euro there will be a second, very specific and at the same time highly symbolic EU pillar is shaking: the Freedom of travel for 400 million Europeans" (*DS*, April 27, 2011).

The abolition of border checks was presented as a necessary condition for the common market, and these important achievements of European integration were threatened by the voluntarism of politicians: "just because of the fickleness and inability of a scandal-ridden Italian head of government. Are all of these (achievements) no longer worth anything?" (*DS*, May 13, 2011).

In contrast, the interest of Czech media in the issue of the future of Schengen was far weaker and no tribunes in favor of border controls emerged. At that time, Czechia was still a 'young' member of the Schengen Area and mainly enjoyed its benefits. A few articles evoked migration as a reason why some voters in France or Italy preferred far-right parties. "Nicolas Sarkozy is concerned if the real or alleged problems with immigration can influence his chances for re-election next year. In France, the support of the nationalist National Front and its leader Marine Le Pen increases" (*Hospodářské noviny*, April 27, 2011). In total, at that time, migration neither elicited emotions nor caused a debate about borders in the Czech newspapers.

2015—Schengen in Times of Migration

Four years later, throughout all selected newspapers, the interest in borders increased. The change was not so dramatic in countries that debated the rules of the Schengen Area in 2011 (France, partly Austria). However, migration and subsequent political reactions caused fever among the Czech public that entered this crisis as a blank sheet. Czechia had not been a typical destination for refugees or migrants from Middle East countries and, suddenly, the atmosphere was dominated by a spiral of instrumentalizing migration for political purposes. The newspaper *Mladá fronta* played a partial role in such development. For example, it brought a report from the Czech border town Břeclav with the headline "Guarders of the border: The concerns from

refugees are here more significant than in the rest of Czechia. When the inhabitants of Břeclav see someone suspicious, they immediately call the police" (*Mladá fronta*, September 4, 2015). The same journalist came with other reports from the borders that emphasized the role of patrols ("Czechia sends riot police to protect its borders"; *MF*, September 16, 2015) or ("Refugees just behind the line. Cínovec is guarded by the police"; *MF*, September 11, 2015).

In the opinion articles in *Mladá fronta*, some authors tried from time to time to calm down the situation, but the context was dominantly embedded in nationalist positions; typically targeted against Germany: "The Germans have implemented what they blamed Hungary for and put Schengen on ice. The reason: they did not manage the wave of refugees" (*MF*, September 14, 2015). This step—the introduction of controls on the German–Austrian border—was presented in an opinion article in *Mladá fronta* under the headline "How the Germans failed" as "the end of the summer fairy tale" (*MF*, September 15, 2015). In this perspective, the decision to control the borders was portrayed as the late and only right step.

The second chosen Czech news title, *Hospodářské noviny*, did not imitate the sharp transformation of *Mladá fronta* from indifference towards migration in 2011 to enthusiasm towards the protection of borders in 2015. Quite on the contrary, *Hospodářské noviny* in the opinion articles presented the reintroduction of border checks as an injury to the European vision and the integration process: "All of these transit countries claim that if Germans fence their borders, they will do the same. A barrier moving as a domino to the southeast would emerge. European integration built on an idea of permeability and openness would get a punch. Would it be lethal? Hard to say" (*Hospodářské noviny*, October 15, 2015).

The criticism of border management was accompanied in *HN* with the following reasoning: "The freedom of movement is one of the basic pillars of European unity and if the states started one after another closing borders, it would mean great victory for terrorists" (*HN*, November 16, 2015), read the audience read after the terror attack at the Bataclan Club in Paris.

The future of Schengen was regarded with high concern also in French news media. Here the debate of 2015 followed up on a thread from 2011. The connection was the person of Nicolas Sarkozy, who orchestrated the closure of the border near Ventimiglia in 2011, and the topic of Schengen reform served as a refrain for his campaign in primaries of the Republican Party (*Les Républicains*) in 2015 and 2016. The intensive migration wave from Syria and Afghanistan was portrayed by him as proof of the need for the radical change of the Schengen system: "Schengen as we wanted and organized it, it's over" (*Le Monde*, October 29, 2015).

Especially in *Le Monde* news reports, the introduction of border checks was seen as a tool of nation-states that contradicted the logic of European integration: (*HN*, November 16, 2015). "Europe is caught in a disastrous downward spiral, yet the only possible solutions to these immense challenges lie in union, not division. In solidarity, not in a deadly selfishness" (*LM*, November 15, 2015).

Such a viewpoint was evident twice during the analyzed period: firstly, in September after the EU experienced the renaissance of border checks and following domino effect when new countries adopted this measure. Secondly, the call against particular national solutions and disintegration was present after the terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015, in Paris: "Deadly cocktail for free movement in Europe: The Schengen area is doubly threatened. By the terrorism that struck France and by the wave of migrants coming from Syria which travels from Turkey to Northern Europe via the Balkans, and which forces, one after the other, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, and even Germany to reintroduce controls at their borders, or to close them" (*LM*, November 20, 2015). In total, *Le Monde* in its content typically countered the politicians who wanted to tighten the restrictions at the borders and defended the principles of EU integration. The headline of an article issued on November 5, 2015, summarizes it: "Schengen is dead? Long live Schengen!" (*LM*, November 5, 2015).

Similar to the debate of 2011, *Le Figaro* saw border issues differently. Although this newspaper did not unilaterally call for the suspension of free movement inside of the Schengen ("I think that the Schengen area is still relevant, that we cannot live politically or economically in an area constrained by internal borders": *Le Figaro*, September 25, 2015), the opinion articles accepted the measures of the borders with sympathy. Such a step was regarded as a reaction to the chaos and defeat of German chancellor Angela Merkel and EU organs: "Today, the extraordinary bureaucratic lock established by Brussels on the re-establishment of internal border controls has shattered under the pressure of the migrant crisis" (*LF*, September 16, 2015) or: "Since Sunday, unfortunately only behind the scenes, a new praise for borders has appeared: these are naturally necessary for the maintenance of public order, for the consideration of national security" (*LF*, September 14, 2015).

The Austrian media also continued to follow their patterns from the border debate in 2011. Both *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* closely watched the Balkan route of migration into the EU with special attention to Germany and its action. As this migration went through Austria, the everyday experience with migrants was also part of news reports. *Der Standard* assessed critically the domino effect of border closures inaugurated to regulate migration and the ambition to construct a 'fortress' from the Schengen Area: "The 'Fortress

Europe' suggests a completely different picture: we build a wall, pull up the drawbridge—and pour down a bucket of the pitch if necessary. No wonder it was the National Socialists who coined this term" (*Der Standard*, October 24, 2015).

The opinion that reintroducing border checks might mean a serious threat to the EU as a whole was prominent in the news. For example, «Anyone who now begins to pull up fences along the national states is betraying the idea of a European Union and burying a peace project for which the Nobel Prize was awarded a few years ago. 'United in diversity' was the EU's motto, but the current outlook is different: separated in envy, fear, and discord" (*DS*, October 29, 2015).

In *Die Presse*, the opinion climate was different. The refugee crisis inside of the Schengen area was portrayed as a "short summer of European anarchy" (*Die Presse*, September 6, 2015), when the refugees did not experience any limits. In the open apology of borders, the world without them was perceived as chaotic: "Everything and every living being are limited by its surface and are only defined in this way in space: every stone, every plant, every animal, and every person. Living beings are even aggregates of borders, in fact mostly billions of them, because each consists of cells, each of which is limited by cell walls and is only viable in this way. So, what happens when these boundaries dissolve?" (*DP*, September 14, 2015).

The role model for ideal border management was here Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán (*DP*, September 24, 2015) and if a call for deeper EU integration appeared, it was a vision that all EU decided to tighten the border controls in a coordinated way (*DP*, September 15, 2015).

2020—Border as a Health Prevention?

Five years later, in early March 2020, the Austrian media and the public discussed a possible new migration crisis triggered by Turkey (*Der Standard*, March 4, 2020). However, after a few days, the hurried closure of nation-state borders due to the upsurge of new coronavirus cases moved the attention to another crisis of border management. In the case of *Der Standard*, the reports were from the very beginning focused not only on the government restrictions but also on the problems the people in the borderlands were facing. Early, the first concerns about the potential misuse of border closures were voiced: "One thinks first of the walls behind which the member states of the EU are now entrenched, of the border controls and entry bans, occasionally applied in a way that is inhumane and contradicts all common rules. Such restrictions may currently be necessary to protect the population, but there were and are political forces in Europe for whom the free movement of people has always been a thorn in their side and the admission of refugees has been

and is the devil's work on their people, especially those from certain countries" (*DS*, March 20, 2020). After the militarization of borders connected with the start of the pandemic, *Der Standard* warned against the side effects of such steps: "Fences were built, and border bars closed. If states do not quickly dismantle the barriers after the coronavirus crisis has subsided, there is a risk of dangerous alienation" (*DS*, May 3, 2020).

The position of *Die Presse* was not much distinct from *Der Standard* which contrasts with the situation in 2011 and 2015. Despite the initial acknowledgment of the nation-state as the institution that secured its citizens via border closures (the virus "demonstrates that boundlessness need not always be a value under all circumstances": *Die Presse*, March 21, 2020), the newspaper finally started to support the lifting of restrictions to enhance the economy, tourism and disrupted social networks: "To get the economy going, the first thing that is needed is an opening of borders, a revitalization of the European internal market, and a re-globalization. A country like Austria, whose prosperity depends on 50 percent on exports and foreign tourism, cannot revive its economy in national quarantine" (*DP*, May 12, 2020) or "Open borders mean more: many people have long had an international social network. They want to see their family, relatives, and friends again - or at least have a perspective when it is possible" (*DP*, May 23, 2020).

When looking into the French media, the intensity of the border debate was different in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. When writing about borders, *Le Monde* highlighted the shock that the French passport could not suddenly guarantee the same freedoms that citizens of the EU used to enjoy. Such a situation was seen as a promised land for the far-right politicians: "It is the world upside down! Dozens of countries are banned from them, not only under the pretext of contagion but also because the COVID-19 feeds nationalist and xenophobic demagoguery" (*LM*, March 18, 2020). Very soon, opinion articles started to question the efficacy of border closure: "Borders, a false remedy for the coronavirus" (*LM*, April 10, 2020).

Le Figaro offered to the audience many texts about the border closures but only a few opinion articles that would discuss specifically this issue. The exceptional cases presented contradicting opinions. On the one hand, it was a French alt-right activist and later presidential candidate from 2022 Éric Zemmour, who praised the institution of a nation-state which, according to him, is more realistic, strong, and efficient than abstract ideologies of a borderless world: "Those infected with the virus have a passport: the Chinese first infected or the Italians infected. But the borderless ideology is stronger than anything" (*Le Figaro*, March 20, 2020).

This way of argumentation was pushed forward one month later: "After the era of blissful globalization, which

was thought to be beneficial to everyone, the notion of borders is gradually being rehabilitated in Europe. Since the early 2000s, the 'opening' had already suffered several stab wounds (crisis of terrorism...)" (*LF*, April 15). The same day, however, the context of the debate was broadened by a claim that "borders are made to be crossed" (*LF*, April 14, 2020).

From the six news media outlets analyzed in this piece, no newspaper advocated the border restrictions so fiercely as the Czech *Mladá fronta*. This newspaper was owned by the close collaborators of the then Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, whose border policy was met with acclamation. The first voice in this direction came on March 13: "The price for the excessive openness of the world, for the fact that we do not have to show our passport at the borders, is very clear. It is a price for Schengen, for a Europe without borders which some of us have tried to say out loud for many years" (*Mladá fronta*, March 13, 2020).

The news articles in *Mladá fronta* were permeated by critique of the EU ("Ursula von der Leyen even opposed the closing of borders. To many people, it seemed unbelievable that she was more interested in the alleged violation of European rules than in the rising numbers of those infected": *MF*, March 17, 2020). Headlines made clear that the threat is behind the borders, in the foreigners who can transmit the deadly virus into Czechia: "There is another world beyond the border, commuters are a risk" (*MF*, March 21, 2020) and "The green border is guarded against the Germans" (*MF*, March 25, 2020). The underlying message for the audience was the following: "Alarm clock for dreamy Europe" (*MF*, March 16, 2020). According to the nationalistic narrative shared by *Mladá fronta*, the institutions of the nation-state solved this crisis better than *naïve* Europe.

On the other side, *Hospodářské noviny* was holding the line of *Der Standard* and *Le Monde*. Although the initial border closure could make sense, the long-term effects could harm the whole EU, according to the opinion articles: "Therefore, when the epidemic is over, we should be careful that the state does not want to retain more control over the people. And that the newly erected borders would not be preserved in the form of a coronavirus curtain, which would appeal to all sorts of authoritarians and nationalists" (*Hospodářské noviny*, March 18, 2020).

Also, the authors of the comments were concerned about how easily many citizens surrender their freedoms: "The specificity of the Czechs is that what would harm them the most in the long run, many of them enthusiastically promote as the best possible way out of the current difficult situation caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus: self-confinement. People would not mind if the borders remained closed for a very long time or if any controls on them worked

forever, as a survey for the SEZNAM ZPRÁVY showed" (HN, April 17, 2020).

Discussion—Re-bordering Processes in Language

As shown above, the context of the border debate changed significantly between 2011 and 2020. If the question of the Schengen reform was rather on the periphery of political and media interest with the small exception of election campaigns and the incident at Ventimiglia after the Euro crisis, the migration into Europe and the coronavirus pandemics represented a game-changer and the borders were once again raised as a topic for news media (Medeiros et al., 2021).

The analysis of the news articles witnesses how rather administrative issues of border controls became political due to the nationalist discourses (Bieber 2020). The border regime became a polarizing topic with the cleavage indicated in a different context by Zhurzhenko (2010) between the *narrative of integration* and the *narrative of security*. The opinion-makers quoted by news media often saw in borders an important symbol of either a bridge to others or a wall. During the 2010s the securitization of borders (Brubaker 2020) was associated with fears of losing security or of losing freedom of movement. The use of metaphorical and symbolic language transformed the conflict over the border regime into an ideological one: value of freedom vs. value of security.

Crises created a scene for re-bordering narratives and policies. The language is an essential part of them (Scott 2012). Those processes were constantly transforming the perceptions of borders and spatial identity (Bossong et al. 2017). If state boundaries had memory, all the talk about them and exceptional measures would mean a precedent for the future. As a result of such policies, the threat was normalized in the political discourse (Karamanidou & Kasperek 2020), which may represent an important precondition for the quick and radical resurrection of borders inside of the EU during the coronavirus pandemic. The states and their re-bordering steps were inspired by the precedents of 2011 and 2015.

The re-bordering or de-bordering tendencies were strengthened by the use of language. Borders, even those inside of the EU, are always in transition and are continuously re-narrated and re-shaped. The development analyzed in this study confirms that imagination, emotions, and symbols are central to the current border debate (Wassenber 2020; Kinnvall 2018). Those media representations helped to constitute the picture that the borders are the center of the political conflict over migration and freedom of movement inside of the EU. Three main categories of discourses were identified:

A Vision of Fortress Europe

The most fervent advocates of border controls in the news media portrayed borders as a site of protection. These opinion makers mentioned borders as the sites of sovereignty where the nation-state guarantees the security of its citizens. According to the logic of this discourse, such ability lay in sharp contrast to the international or supranational organizations that are associated with the vision of a borderless and fluid world. Borders here play the role of a filter installed by the state to decide who has a right to entry and who does not have this privilege. This argumentation prefers order and control to the liberties and the freedom of movement is seen as a luxury for times of 'good weather'. This goes together with the argumentation of Trucco (2023), who noted that the narrative of solidarity at the borders is sometimes criminalized by the proponents of securitization. It is particularly telling that such a conception of strict border controls points to the external threat from outside (Casaglia et al. 2020). In a conflict "Us vs. Them" the border is believed to be a decisive battlefield (van Houtum 1999). On a symbolic level, terms like 'fortress', 'citadel', or 'wall' are very often evoked.

A vision of borders as a necessary evil

Some of the opinion makers tried to justify the border measures by their temporality. The reintroduction of border controls was, therefore, portrayed as a rather neutral technical measure that did not contradict the rules of the Schengen Agreement. When reintroducing border controls with this rhetoric, the governments wanted to satisfy more extreme voices who were dreaming about 'fortress Europe' while at the same time calming down those with concerns about the future of freedom of movement. However, even this approach that tried to downplay the symbolic value of border controls contributed to the normalization of them in the discourse and was part of re-bordering tendencies (Colombeau 2020; Evrard et al. 2020).

A vision of borders as the site of solidarity

The third group of articles criticized the rush to close the internal borders of the Schengen Area as a lack of solidarity. According to them, the Schengen border regime stands upon the solidarity of the member states of the EU. If one cannot exercise its role on the external border of Schengen or if one reintroduces controls in the inner part of Schengen, the situation may escalate into a domino effect when the states just follow the steps of others and introduce border checks in an uncoordinated way. Their authors warned of the domino effect of mutual suspects and mistrust that could mean an end of freedom of movement. This study shows that the narrative of integration is present in some more conservative media (*Die Presse, Le Figaro, Mladá fronta*) in times of crisis. The opinion makers that

spread the fear of external threats did not usually have any opponents there and such media could turn into loudspeakers for the narrative of security.

Conclusion

Lamour (2019) in his study on the representations of the Schengen Treaty in museums found that the picture of Schengen may oscillate between tribute to the freedom of movement and the presentation of controls and the filter of legal/illegal entries on the external border (Infantino 2019). This paper looked for the media representations of borders inside of the Schengen Area in times of so-called crisis. Except for praise for freedom of movement, the decade of the 2010s witnessed also sharp criticism of the Schengen regime and calls for nation-state sovereignty represented on the borders. This paper shows how the border debate came to Czechia with a significant delay in comparison with France or Austria. This analysis also reflects how the topic of border control became polarising hand in hand with the issue of migration. Borders became one of the main symbols of the perceived migration and coronavirus crises as both focused on the mobility of citizens. In the 2020s, migration still presents a challenge for the European border debate. It is, therefore, a timely research question of how narratives of integration and security evolve and what forms they will take in the future.

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