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**BACHELOR THESIS**  
EUROPEAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

*Legitimization on FRONTEX Operations in the Euro-African  
Borderlands by the Media : A Critical Media Discourse Analysis*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research has explored how the management of undocumented migration by Frontex was legitimized in the media since the refugee crisis of 2015. It has been hypothesized by means of three different hypotheses that an intensification could be observed in the rhetorics of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization after the refugee crisis, starting in 2015. After the establishment of these hypotheses, a critical media discourse analysis has been done in order to test these hypotheses. The results indicate that the management of undocumented migration by Frontex was legitimized in the media via a dramatized representation of the refugee crisis and the representation of migrants as being both ‘victims’ and ‘Others’. Moreover, an intensification in the rhetorics of securitization and humanitarianization as legitimization strategies could be observed in the press releases after the refugee crisis. This research encourages EU citizens to critically assess EU policies on migration and particularly the representation of Frontex’s border management by the media, since the media representation is often different from reality. Furthermore, the thesis advises EU policy makers to re-consider human rights in border management, since it is argued that the focus on securitization is to the detriment of human rights. The European Union did not make significant amendments to its migration policy which fully cover human rights protection in the face of the refugee crisis. Thus, the EU should review its border management in order to ensure that a human rights-based focus is at the heart of its border-associated measures in order to meet the concerns and needs of the migrants who need our protection.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“What the media exercises is the power to represent the world in certain definite ways. And because there are many different and conflicting ways in which the meaning about the world can be constructed, it matters profoundly what and who gets represented, who and what regularly and routinely gets left out; and how things, people, events, and relationships are represented. What we know of society depends on how things are represented to us and that knowledge in turn informs what we do and what policies we are prepared to accept” (Miller, 2002, p. 46).

Undocumented migration in the Euro-African borderlands has received excessive media attention in the past years. The Western media consumer was especially confronted with news coverage on migration at the start of the refugee crisis in April 2015, when images of drowning refugees in the Mediterranean sea shocked the public opinion. Suddenly, the border crossing was called “a crisis” instead of an “emergency”. Until today, sensational media reportage and popular discourses in many European countries depict African “illegal” migration as a massive group of desperate people who are trying to enter the European Union in order to get rid of poverty and warfare in their home country (de Haas, 2008). Moreover, the media and politicians often use terms such as “invasion” and “plague” to describe this border crossing. Undocumented migrants are said to threaten the state’s sovereign powers and to endanger the European values and identity. Furthermore, “they are perceived to carry strange customs, diseases, and a backpack full of poverty” (Andersson, 2010, p. 29). Many scholars already focused on the representation of refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers in the media, such as Fürsich (2010) and Khosravini (2010). Fürsich (2010) researched this depiction of migrants as ‘Others’ by the media and she argues that reality is socially constructed by the mass media. What is more, Khosravini (2010) argues that refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers are constructed in similar ways in newspapers. They are constructed as “one unanimous group with all sharing similar characteristics, backgrounds, intentions, motivations and economic status or reducing these groups to their functions” (Khosravini, 2010, p. 13). There will be elaborated on these authors in the next chapter, since they are useful in order to form a critical stance at the media representations of migrants as ‘Others’. Related to representation is the concept of legitimization, which is a rhetoric that refers to the exercise of power by the political sphere to achieve certain goals. This is where Frontex comes in, since Frontex attempts to affect the public discussion on issues concerning border management by means of promoting a certain rhetoric in the media (Horsti, 2012).

Since the 1990s, a security and emergency frame characterizes the European media discourse on migration and Frontex was established in 2004 in order to deal with these public concerns at a European

level (Horsti, 2012). Many researchers have been focusing on the origins of Frontex and its specific tasks, such as Léonard (2010) and Chillaud (2016). The agency was created with ‘‘the main objective of coordinating operational cooperation amongst Member States to strengthen security at the external borders of the European Union’’ (Léonard, 2010, p. 233). Thus, Frontex is responsible for the management of the EU’s external borders and operates as a semi-independent agency of the European Union. In the past decade, the European Union and its Member States have invested heavily in a border regime, with ‘‘illegal’’ migrants being their main target. Frontex’s role is to coordinate these ‘‘joint operations’’. Horsti (2012) added before the refugee crisis a research on Frontex’s public role in the media. He argues that ‘‘the agency has become an important reference for policymakers and a media source across Europe’’ (Horsti, 2012, p. 297). It is often referred to as an expert source, and its own ‘rescue’ operations and border guard trainings are extensively covered in the media (Horsti, 2012). Yet, as highlighted before, Frontex is a key actor in influencing the public debate on migration issues through the promotion a certain rhetoric in the media (Horsti, 2012).

However, little academic research has focused on Frontex’s public role in the media since the start of the refugee crisis in 2015, especially in connection with legitimization strategies. This Bachelor thesis will fill this knowledge gap by positing a new and recent view on the representation of Frontex’s border management by the media. The research question that can be attached to this is: *How was the management of undocumented migration by Frontex legitimized in the media since the refugee crisis of 2015?* This paper will add to existing research in the sense that it will engage in an analytical discussion of relevant scholarly works in the discussion about the legitimization and representation of two Frontex operations by the media. Through this analytical discussion, this research hopes to create new insights in the extent to which the legitimization strategies of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization are visible in the press releases of and on Frontex. This research has a societal relevance as well, since it hopes to trigger the way of thinking of EU citizens on EU migration policies in general and especially about Frontex’s media representation. The aim is to evoke a critical attitude of society towards Frontex’s border management and its media representation. As media consumers, we need to be constantly critical in assessing the messages that we receive, since the media is often representing issues in a certain way that is different from ‘reality’, as highlighted by Miller (2002) at the beginning of this chapter. Another reason why this research is socially relevant is that the content will challenge the current securitization of migration of the European Union, since it is argued that the focus of security is to the detriment of the focus on human rights.

In order to give an answer to the research question, a discussion of relevant literature on the legitimization of Frontex’s sea operations by the media will follow in the next chapter. This discussion will lead to three hypotheses (1, 2a, 2b) concerning the visibility of these legitimization strategies in the press releases of and on Frontex after the refugee crisis. In the chapter that follows, the methodological

approach will be addressed. Chapter four will focus on the Data Analysis, which will explore to what extent the three rhetorics are prominent in the press releases of and on Frontex after the refugee crisis by means of a critical media discourse analysis. This Bachelor thesis will end with a fifth chapter in which conclusions will be drawn from the Data Analysis. Furthermore, an extensive discussion will be provided, which will include suggestions for future researchers on how to build further on this research.

## **2. THEORY AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

This chapter will provide a discussion of relevant literature on the legitimization of Frontex's sea operations by the media. The theoretical framework will start with the definitions of Hall (1997) on representation. Furthermore, the work of Fürsich (2010) on media and the representation of others will be discussed. Afterwards, three media representations as part of the legitimization strategies of the European Union's border management will be provided. These are securitization, humanitarianization and militarization. Three hypotheses will be derived from the discussion of these strategies concerning their visibility in media representations after the refugee crisis.

### **2.1. WHAT IS REPRESENTATION?**

The media are an important platform for constructing and spreading different understandings of migration. The media are especially important in providing views and images on migration issues of which the general European citizen has little direct experience, such as undocumented migration (Horsti, 2012). As a result, the media can play an important role in shaping citizens' perceptions on migration, which is done through representation. Stuart Hall presents two definitions of representation. The first definition that can be distinguished is: "to represent something is to describe or depict it" (ChallengingMedia, 2006). In other words, representation is the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted through images, screens or the words on a page of a newspaper. Yet, there is often a difference between the 'true meaning' of something that is depicted and the media representation, which Hall (1997) calls "the gap of representation". The second definition is as follows: "representation is to symbolize and to stand for." (ChallengingMedia, 2006) "In and through representations, members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who 'we' are in relation to who 'we' are not, whether as 'us' and 'others', 'insider' and 'outsider', 'the west' and 'the rest'. By such means, the social interests mobilized across society are marked out and differentiated from each other." (Cottle, 2000, p. 14). Hall's second definition can be well-connected to migration, since migrants are often represented in de media as the European citizen's 'Other'. This definition of representation is thus the most relevant for this thesis and will be used as the main conceptualization. The topic of media and representation of 'Others' will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.1.1. MEDIA AND THE REPRESENTATION OF OTHERS**

The work of Fürsich (2010) can be regarded as a relevant contribution to the depiction of migrants as 'Others' by the media, for her research focused on this specific topic. She argues that reality is socially constructed by the mass media. Furthermore, mass media are normalising certain ideologies or world views. What is more, they are crucial agents in the construction and maintenance of the public discourse on integration, tolerance and social cohesion (Fürsich, 2010). An important point for this thesis is her

claim that the contemporary media fail to depict cultural diversity (Fürsich, 2010). In line with this claim, she distinguished two problems with the current media reporting. The one refers to a traditional problem of international reporting, which is ethnocentrism. This means that Western countries are reporting any event from their point of view and they tend to negatively frame undeveloped nations (Fürsich, 2010). Another problem that she identifies points to the effect of globalisation. She claims that “the current intensified level of globalisation led to an even worse problematic representation of Others in the media and failed to reflect an enlightened and humanistic cosmopolitanism in the media” (Fürsich, 2010, p. 118). Concerning the media representation on refugees specifically, the work of Khosravini (2010) can be perceived to be useful. He argues that the newspapers that have been analysed in his research contribute to construct refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers in similar ways. They are constructed as “one unanimous group with all sharing similar characteristics, backgrounds, intentions, motivations and economic status or reducing these groups to their functions” (Khosravini, 2010, p. 13). According to Fürsich (2010, p. 127), “the representation of Others has been tied up in long-established signifying practices that are slow to change because of systemic media constraints.” By introducing Fürsich (2010) and Khosravini (2010), this section hopes to trigger a critical stance at the media representations of migrants as ‘Others’ and afterwards at the border management of the European Union. The next section will deal with the legitimization of the EU’s border control.

## **2.2. LEGITIMIZATION OF EU BORDER MANAGEMENT**

Closely linked to representation is the concept of legitimization, which is a rhetoric that refers to the exercise of power by the political sphere to achieve certain goals by means of representation. Moreover, “legitimization is a justification of a behaviour” (Reyes, 2011, p. 782). In this process of legitimization through media representation, the actor that is providing information often searches for the media consumer’s approval. This search for approval can be motivated by reasons such as the maintenance of power, the achievement of social acceptance or the augmentation of popularity. In order to obtain people’s support, it is often attempted to present the proposal as the suitable way to proceed and as the best thing to do (Reyes, 2011). In the legitimization process, social actors often employ the use of personal experiences as an instrument. This tends to legitimize the speakers’ views concerning the event, the actions taken following a particular event and the news connected to the event (Reyes, 2011). In the next section, three media representations as part of legitimization strategies of EU border management will be discussed, focusing on Frontex’s role specifically. The word strategy here refers to a set of discursive practices that are adopted to reach specific political, social or psychological aims (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). Léonard (2010) refers to the joint operations coordinated by Frontex as securitising strategies. Chillaud (2016) follows up on this by saying that Frontex’s activities are perceived to be ‘extraordinary’ and affect the EU’s process of securitization. Furthermore, Frontex has received much criticism of pro-migrant groups and human rights activists concerning their legality in dealing with



border control (Chillaud, 2016). It is to this securitization approach of dealing with migration that there will be turned now.

### **2.2.1. SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

In line with the research of Chillaud (2016), it can be argued that the concept of European security (which is both internal and external) has been blurred by the establishment of Frontex, since the EU has tried to strengthen its external borders in order to keep these ‘Others’ out, while at the same time attempted to promote the freedom of movement of people internally. In other words, ‘migration issues were securitized against the backdrop of European integration’ (Chillaud, 2016, p. 29). Securitization of migration can be conceptualized as ‘a process wherein an urgent ‘threat’ mobilizes and legitimizes legislation and policies that would not otherwise be accepted’ (Horsti, 2012, p. 299). As a result, the media have constructed the problem of migration since the early 1990s, since it is supposed to pose a threat to our Union (Horsti, 2012). This mediatization has been a crucial instrument in the construction of this social problem and thereby it attached a sense of urgency to it. The public attention on this socially constructed ‘immediate threat’ due to the representation in the media has led policy makers to introduce control measures to limit international mobility and thus to limit the number of migrants entering our territory (Horsti, 2012).

Two other scholars that make a contribution in line with Horsti’s work are Didier Bigo and Bastian A. Vollmer. Bigo (2002) argues that governments are promoting a rhetoric of security and risk, which is influenced by agents that enhanced their surveillance capacities. Vollmer (2016) states that border politics is now framed as body politics, depicting migrants as the ‘penetration or infection’ of something foreign into the body of the nation state. This results in the perceived necessity to monitor the borders by means of technologies of surveillance in order to guarantee the integrity of what is ‘inside’ (Bigo, 2002). Moreover, ‘this metaphor of penetration is based on the presupposition that it is possible to control the flow of individuals at the borders of the state’ (Bigo, 2002, p. 69). Wodak and Boukala (2015) wrote as well about these exclusionary practices promoted by the European Union and they say that the EU constructs its identity via its distinction from the other. It enforces this European identity via border and body politics. Migrants are often represented as ‘an anonymous mass and potential threat to public health, public security, and national identities, which legitimizes the exclusion of the ‘other’ (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 268). Thus, the body of the nation state is perceived to need protection by means of decreased levels of liberty and enhanced levels of security (Vollmer, 2016). This ‘moralization of bordering’, as he refers to it, implies increasing the process of securitization. ‘The securitization of migrants is framed by discourses in which freedom is always associated at its limits with danger and (in)security’ (Bigo, 2002, p. 65). Bigo (2002) did research on the reasons of this persistent framing of migration as ‘a danger of an existential threat to the state’, thus along the lines

of an emergency rhetoric. He argues that securitization is used by the providers of security, such as Frontex, in order to confirm the importance of their role as providers of protection and security. Thus, the framing of the state as threatened by migrants is a narrative, which is used in order to justify authority. In other words, migration became a security issue ‘‘due to the presentation as such by professionals of threat management in their struggle to maintain their position’’ (Bigo, 2002, p. 76). Bigo (2002) argues that their framing is difficult to change, since professionals have the advantage of exercising authority by means of knowledge and technologies to respond to the threat.

The current events that lead to the securitization of migration are framed and experienced as a crisis. The refugee crisis is perceived to threaten the integrity of the European Union, due to an alleged unmanageable amount of people wanting to enter this territory. In line with what is said above, this thesis hypothesizes (1) that *an intensification of the securitization rhetoric can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015*. Two by-products of the securitization process are humanitarianization and militarization. These could be two other types of media representations as part of legitimization strategies in the Frontex press releases after the refugee crisis and will be addressed in the next section.

### **2.2.2. HUMANITARIANIZATION AS FRONTEX’S LEGITIMIZATION STRATEGY**

Representations in the media can highlight the humanitarian discourse of the migrant’s lives, by means of taking an emotional approach in phrasing the story, which is the conceptualization of humanitarianization. Related to this humanitarian discourse is victimization, which is ‘‘a process whereby migrants are presented as victims either of their culture, criminal smugglers, or sometimes the immigration regimes of Europe’’ (Horsti, 2012, p. 299). Moreno-Lax (2017, p. 130) argues that ‘‘migrants are doubly victimized, as subjects of smuggling/trafficking and as shipwrecked’’. Chillaud (2016) argues that Frontex uses this humanitarian rhetoric, and thus the protection of migrants, in order to justify their ‘exceptional’ control measures. ‘‘The presentation of a Frontex operation, dealing with undocumented migration, as a kind of ‘humanitarian intervention’ constitutes the last stage in the objectification of protection-seekers that the humanitarianization of borders entails’’ (Chillaud, 2016, p. 32). It is argued that ‘‘humanitarianism blurs the lines between means and ends, legitimizing recourse to any means necessary to achieve the higher ends of humanity, including security and recourse to force. Thus, humanitarian vocabulary can camouflage the most naked exercise of power and justify a divestiture of rights provided that that is perceived to protect’’ (Moreno-Lax, 2017, p. 132). Chillaud (2016) calls this the securitization of human rights, which is constituted within a larger ‘normalized’ securitization of migration. Since the rhetoric of humanitarianization tends to be used by Frontex in order to justify control measures, as stated earlier, it can be hypothesized (2a) that *an intensification of*

*language pointing to humanitarianization can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015, due to the alleged unmanageable flow of migrants to Europe starting with the refugee crisis.*

### **2.2.3. MILITARIZATION AND LEGITIMIZATION**

Moreno-Lax (2017, p. 132) builds on this humanitarianization by saying that “the minimalist humanitarianism infused in European border work gives way to a new, militaristic type of intervention through the mobilization of ‘war-like’ images. This discounts not only individual rights, but their very holders as well”. This is where militarization comes in, which is closely related to humanitarianization. Chillaud (2016, p. 33) argues that “it seems that the military vocabulary used by Frontex have an aim of dramatizing the political situation and to give weight to the (security) legitimacy of the agency given the traditional role of military in addressing security issues.” Ossewaarde (2017) claims as well that migration in itself tends to be identified as a military strategy, which can be translated as militarization. He uses the war on terrorism as an example for this, which was clearly identified as the typical war-context of the refugee crisis. Since the military vocabulary concerning Frontex’s operations tends to benefit the agency’s legitimacy, the last hypothesis (2b) of this thesis will be that *an intensification of the militarization rhetoric can be detected in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015.*

All in all, this thesis will explore if the rhetorics on securitization, humanitarianization and militarization are more prominent in the press releases after the refugee crisis, taking into account operation ‘Themis’, which entered into force after the refugee crisis, and the documentation on operation ‘Triton’, which started to execute from 2014-2018. In the next chapter, a critical media discourse will be done, focussing on the themes of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization that are introduced in this section. There will be looked at the presence of the language pointing to these themes before and after the refugee crisis. There will be tried to uncover the power structures that underlie the presence of these themes in the press releases on two Frontex operations. Afterwards, a critical analysis will follow which aims at providing another alternative explanation, exposing these power structures.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methods that have been used in order to give an answer to the research question. This section will be divided in four parts. Firstly, the research design will be discussed, which will explain what a critical media discourse analysis entails and why this research design is considered to be appropriate for this thesis. Afterwards, the choice for the two Frontex operations, ‘operation Themis’ and ‘operation Triton’ will be motivated in the part on case selection. Finally, the data collection method will be addressed, which will explain the way of data collection and selection. Moreover, it will explain how the data will be analysed.

#### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The data for this thesis has been approached with a critical media discourse analysis, which is a qualitative method of analysis. More specifically, a thematic analysis has been applied, aiming at ‘‘identifying a limited number of meaningful categories or themes in a body of data’’ (Fulcher, 2010, p. 5) in order to properly understand and interpret the meanings of text. In this critical media discourse analysis, focus was put on the themes of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization, as introduced in the theoretical framework. I looked at the presence of the language pointing to these themes before and after the refugee crisis. Moreover, I tried to uncover the power structures that underlie the presence of these themes in the press releases of two Frontex operations. The critical media discourse analysis aimed at providing an alternative explanation, exposing these power structures.

The reason for choosing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) is that this type of research design is particularly appropriate when aiming at identifying discursive strategies used in texts. Moreover, this analysis concentrates on the inter-connectedness in texts (Horsti, 2012), which is necessary in this research, since it focuses on both Frontex’s publications and its media representations. A critical discourse analysis is thus the best way to be able to assess the interconnectedness between these different sources. Critical discourse analysis is perceived to be of assistance in understanding complex social issues, such as migration. We can gain an understanding of how language exactly functions in generating knowledge by means of the CDA, since media discourses/texts have a key function in constructing individuals, in depicting a certain version of the world and they provide input for many citizens’ thoughts about migration (Mogashoa, 2014). McGregor (2010) argues that critical discourse analysis aims at challenging our words as being meaningful in a specific social, historical and political condition. ‘‘Critical discourse analysis systematically studies instances of social interaction and aims to systematically explore social and cultural structures, relations and processes which are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power’’ (McGregor, 2010, p. 2). Furthermore, discourse analysis is meant to provide a higher awareness of the hidden motivations and underlying power structures and, therefore, enables us to solve concrete problems. The object of critical discourse analysis

is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in a written text in order to resist power structures. This is perceived to be useful for this bachelor thesis, since it aims at exposing the power structures underlying the language in the press releases.

### **3.2. CASE SELECTION**

The themes of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization have been applied to two “rescue” operations, operation “Triton” and operation “Themis”. It is in the interest to compare the media representations of those two specific operations, since operation “Triton” entered into force in 2014, so a year before the start of the refugee crisis. On the contrary, operation “Themis” was the successor of operation “Triton” and started recently, in February 2018. It is interesting to see whether Frontex’s representation and legitimization on those operations by the media changed significantly since the refugee crisis. Moreover, it is unique to include operation ‘Themis’, since the media representation of this operation has not been covered by researchers yet, due to its recent date. However, the drawback of including this recent operation is that the availability of data is lower compared to operation ‘Triton’. For this reason, close attention will be paid to the presence of the three themes in the documentation on operation ‘Triton’ after the refugee crisis as well.

### **3.3. DATA COLLECTION METHOD**

The specific procedure for collecting data will be explained in this part in order to facilitate reproducibility. The secondary data for the analysis has been conducted by means of desk research. Data has been collected from both the Frontex website and press releases published on the website of other European newspapers. On the Frontex website (<https://frontex.europa.eu>), four query terms were used. Firstly, the term ‘operation Triton’ gave 63 results. Four of these results focused on photos of the operations. These hits were eliminated for the analysis, since the analysis focuses on discovering the deeper meaning of texts. Moreover, some articles addressed important partners of Frontex, which were eliminated as well for they are not in the scope of this research. Other articles that were removed for the analysis were considered to be too technical, since they focused for instance on Frontex’s information management or on the specifics of the coordination of operations. Secondly, ‘operation ‘Themis’ gave two hits. One of them was a video, which explained the technical details of the operation. This hit was removed from the analysis, since I did not consider it to be of added value. The terms ‘refugee crisis’ and ‘migrant crisis’ gave seven and nine results respectively. Some of them were eliminated for the analysis because they were not significantly addressing the three themes addressed in the theoretical framework. In total, 38 articles from the Frontex website have been selected for the analysis. The specific time frame is 24/12/2015 until 20/02/2018.

In order to retrieve data on Frontex operations from other newspapers, the query terms ‘operation Themis’ and ‘operation Triton’ have been used via the search engine Google. In total, seven articles

have been selected via this way. Again, articles that focused on the technical details of the operations were excluded from the analysis. The query term 'operation Themis' gave the most relevant hits, addressing the themes discussed in the theoretical framework and useful opinions. In this case, the time frame of the selected articles is 07/10/2014 until 12/03/2018.

All in all, the 45 articles that have been used for the analysis have been selected on the basis of relevance and coherence with the three themes addressed in the theoretical framework. Appendix 1 shows the websites that have been used, including a classification of the data in chronological time order and a classification on the basis of themes that can be distinguished through colours. The focus of the next chapter will be the 'Data Analysis', in which I will analyse the data by means of quotes of the respective articles and my own interpretations of them.

## **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

This analysis will be guided by the following research question that is at the heart of this Bachelor thesis: *How was the management of undocumented migration by Frontex legitimized in the media since the refugee crisis of 2015?* This chapter will explore to what extent the rhetorics on securitization, humanitarianization and militarization are prominent in the press releases after the refugee crisis, starting in 2015. In this chapter, a critical media discourse will be done, focussing on the three themes addressed in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the power structures that underlie the presence of these themes in the press releases on two Frontex operations will be uncovered. The Data Analysis will consist of sections dealing first with the representation of the refugee crisis and migrants, and secondly with dramatization as a widely used rhetoric. Moreover, an analysis of the presence of the themes of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization in the press releases will follow. The next section will deal with the representation of the refugee crisis.

### **4.1. REPRESENTATION OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS**

The refugee crisis was already anticipated in December 2014, when the Frontex media referred to the amount of migrants coming to the European Union as the ‘‘Augustus peak’’ (Frontex, 2014: 3). In the same article, they stated: ‘‘There is no doubt that the Mediterranean coasts are now in serious crisis’’ (Frontex, 2014: 5). What can be observed here immediately is the absoluteness of the statement. By using the wording ‘there is no doubt’, they state it as if it is an absolute matter of fact that Europe is facing a crisis. Not only Frontex is using this absoluteness in its press releases. This phenomenon is also observed in the press releases concerning the migration crisis in other newspapers: ‘‘There’s no doubt that the vast majority of the population of EU member states view the current situation in the Mediterranean crossing as a serious crisis’’ (The Conversation, 2015: 672). In the beginning of February 2015, Frontex demonstrates the perceived crisis with numbers, by saying: ‘‘Although some data are still missing for December 2014, the number of detections of illegal border-crossing in 2014 is two and a half times larger than the year before and twice as much as in 2011. This increase is mostly connected to the increasing number of refugees and displaced people worldwide, related to the ongoing conflict in Syria and its spread to Iraq, which have created the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War related to the ongoing conflict in Syria and its spread to Iraq’’ (Frontex, 2015: 26). In this sentence, they do not only mention the refugee crisis, but also attach a certain value to it: they call it ‘the worst’, for the EU detected ‘‘the biggest wave of illegal border crossings since Frontex data-collection started eight years ago’’ (Frontex, 2015: 221).

What can be observed in many press releases is that they often talk about numbers and percentages. This is true for the following statements: ‘‘On the Central Mediterranean route, detections totalled more than 6 700, considerably higher than a year ago in December 2013 (~2 700)’’ (Frontex,

2015: 33). Six months later, Frontex published: "The 27 operations over the weekend constituted one of the busiest three-day periods since the operation was launched in November 2014. We have never had so many people on board before. We had many challenges on Saturday as there were so many boats in need at the same time" (Frontex, 2015: 301). Especially in the previous sentence, the refugee crisis is represented as if it keeps increasing. The same is true for the following sentence: "More than 23 000 migrants arrived in Greece by sea last week, nearly 50 percent more than in the previous week" (Frontex, 2015: 306). It should be noted that these numbers are provided in the context of an intense refugee crisis. For this reason, it is argued in this thesis that the reason for the usage of numbers and percentages is to depict the specific growth of the refugee crisis in order to give it more urgency. They want to present it as if it keeps increasing and thus a suitable solution is required in the form of intensive border management.

Yet, further than saying that the crisis existed and kept increasing did Frontex not go until that time. This changed in October 2015, when Frontex published: "We are facing a migratory and refugee crisis. Because of this, Frontex has called on Member States for the first time to provide such a large number of border guards. I appreciate that they have come through with the most officers ever offered," said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri" (Frontex, 2015: 326). This statement depicts the presence of the migration crisis and the need for more border guards in order to deal with it. Leggeri follows-up on this statement by saying: "I hope we can move much closer to our goal. For this reason, I would like to stress that Member States can continue sending their contributions even though the deadline for the call has passed," Leggeri added." In line with this, he states as well: "In terms of working hours, the response from the Member States covers about a quarter of what Frontex has requested" (Frontex, 2015: 335). This statement is interpreted as an incentive for the Member States (MSs) to send border guards in order to assist the European Union in dealing with the migration crisis. By depicting it as a crisis, Frontex attaches a certain urgency to their statement and this could increase the willingness of the Member States to send their contributions. This interpretation can be supported by this sentence: "The extraordinary migratory pressure on Italy and Greece has clearly demonstrated that it is a European challenge which requires a European response," said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri" (Frontex, 2016: 356). The wording of 'extraordinary migratory pressure' attaches a certain urgency to the establishment of a European response. It should be noted that this is the first time that an explicit incentive to a common European approach to the migration crisis is given in the press releases on the Frontex website.

When time passes, the attachment of urgency to Frontex's statements is only increasing. In May 2017, Frontex still hints that the refugee crisis is still going on and perceived to increase. On their website, it is stated that: "the number of migrants who arrived in Italy this year rose 43% to 36 000" (Frontex, 2017: 466). In June, they add: "This is the largest number of people rescued within such a brief span so far this year" (Frontex, 2017: 482). In July 2017, Frontex even sees the need to reinforce operation Triton with the help of the MSs due to an "extraordinary pressure". Frontex Executive



Director Fabrice Leggeri says: “All participants recognised that Italy is facing extraordinary pressure and needs additional support from the EU and Frontex. Furthermore, Italy has indicated that in case of massive influx of migrants, it would like to be able to disembark migrants in the ports of other Member States” (Frontex, 2017: 500). Especially the last sentence points to the introduction of a new operative tool, namely the introduction of disembarkation of migrants in closer ports. It should be noted that this piece of text is published half a year before the release of operation ‘Themis’. Thus, this ‘extraordinary pressure’ could be the reason for a demand for a new operation that goes further than the previous one. This measure points as well to a willingness to increase cooperation among MSs. This is backed up by the following statement: “In today’s interconnected world, we have to increase our cooperation at all levels if we are to tackle rising migratory flows” (Frontex, 2017: 525).

When it comes to real action, newspaper The Sun already argued in January 2017 that the migration crisis was far from over. Dover MP Charlie Elphicke said in this article: “The EU has much work to do to get a grip on this crisis. Clearly much more action is needed to secure the North African Coast” (The Sun, 2017: 688). In another article, they state: “The good summer weather will probably see more migrants making the sea crossing to Spain. Although the situation is unpredictable, we have to be prepared for several intense months in terms of arrivals” (The Sun, 2017: 738). The implication of both statements is that an institution is demanded and required that guarantees this European security to a greater extent, resulting from the ‘ever growing’ refugee crisis. These statements are interpreted in this thesis as legitimizing the role of Frontex, since Frontex is responsible for taking action in securing the borders of the European Union. By representing the ‘wave’ of migrants coming to the European Union as constructing a severe refugee crisis, an urgent response is perceived to be required. This response can be provided by Frontex.

Summarized, the observed intensive usage of numbers and percentages in Frontex’s press releases serves to depict the specific growth of the refugee crisis in order to give it more urgency, as argued in this thesis. Moreover, by depicting it as a ‘crisis’, Frontex attaches a certain urgency to their statement. They want to present it as if ‘the wave’ of migrants to the EU keeps getting bigger, which leads to the demand for a suitable solution in the form of intensive border management, which can be provided by Frontex. As argued in this thesis, the attachment of urgency to Frontex’s statements is only increasing when time passes. As highlighted previously, the ‘ever growing’ refugee crisis, requires an institution that guarantees this European security. Thus, this legitimizes the role of Frontex, since Frontex is perceived to be a key actor in controlling the EU borders. What is more, the representation of migrants in a certain way can facilitate this process of legitimization. This will be explained in the next section, which will be dealing with the representation of migrants, which is clearly done in the press releases of and on Frontex.

#### 4.1.1. REPRESENTATION OF MIGRANTS

Migrants are represented in many different ways in the press releases since the refugee crisis. In February 2015, migrants were represented as “the survivors”. This can be illustrated by the following statement: “The African migrants who survived the traumatic events” (Frontex, 2015: 97). This is quite an emotional way of representing them. The same is true for migrants being referred to as “people in distress” (Frontex, 2016: 397). In these statements, they are presented as victims that need to be assisted. This perceived need to assist them can also be retrieved from the following quote: “Screening experts also identify persons in need of international protection as well as those in a vulnerable situation, including unaccompanied minors, and refer them to the competent national authorities” (Frontex, 2018: 538). In this sentence, ‘irregular’ migrants are presented as ‘persons in need of international protection’, ‘people in a vulnerable situation’ and ‘unaccompanied minors’. Yet, this kind of positive attitude towards refugees is not always visible in the press releases. In many articles, the group of refugees coming to the EU is represented as ‘a wave’ or ‘a flow’. This can be showed by the following statements: “The Mediterranean is the most affected by migratory flows” (Frontex, 2016: 406) and “This is the biggest wave of migrants we have seen in 2015” (Frontex, 2015: 264). This is not specifically a negative representation of migrants, yet it tries to show the height of the problem and indicates the urgency of a response. Even more urgency is attached to the refugee crisis by presenting migrants as “illegal immigrants poured into the EU” (Frontex, 2017: 676). The word “illegal” adds a negative value to the immigrants and the verb ‘poured’ refers again to this stream or flow of migrants that is coming to the EU. This refers again to the quantity of the migrants that leads to presenting it as a crisis. Furthermore, ‘illegal’ or ‘irregular’ migrants are presented rather negatively in a press release of Frontex in January 2018, when they are referred to people who claim false nationality and people without identification documents’. This is visible in the following sentence: “Many people who cross Europe’s external borders irregularly arrive without any identification documents. Others claim false nationality in order to increase their chances of receiving a form of protection in the European Union” (Frontex, 2018: 531). Another statement that struck me was published in March 2018: “Aris Amiri, the Tunisian who crashed a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin in December 2016, leaving 12 dead and 49 injured, has been traced to a boat landed at the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2011” (Frontex, 2018: 807). It seems here as if Frontex is trying to represent migrants as being dangerous.

This section has introduced different representations of migrants. What can be said about all of them is that migrants tend to be constructed as “one anonymous group with all sharing similar characteristics, backgrounds, intentions, motivations and economic status or reducing these groups to their functions” (Khosravinik, 2010, p. 13), as already mentioned in the theoretical framework. All in all, both the ‘negative’ and the ‘positive’ representations could be other means to legitimize the role of Frontex. By representing migrants negatively as ‘Others’, as ‘dangerous’ or as ‘flows’ in the media (Fürsich, 2010), border control tends to focus on the necessity to keep these people out. This legitimizes

the role of Frontex, since Frontex executes the border management of the European Union. Moreover, the role of Frontex is legitimized by representing migrants as ‘victims’, since the European Border and Coast Guard Agency is perceived to save the lives of these ‘victims’. This issue will be addressed later in the thesis in the section on humanitarianization. Yet, as already highlighted in the theoretical framework, one should be critical on the objectivity of the representations by the mass media, since the mass media are key in socially constructing reality (Fürsich, 2010). The next section will introduce the dramatization of the refugee crisis.

#### **4.1.2. DRAMATIZATION OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS AS LEGITIMIZING THE ROLE OF FRONTEX**

This thesis argues that the interpretation of the previous two sections is that the refugee crisis and migrants are constructed in such a way that drama, fear or danger tends to be created. As addressed in the theoretical framework, this mediatization has been a crucial instrument in the construction of this social problem and thereby attached a certain urgency to it. The public attention on this socially constructed “‘immediate threat” due to the representation in the media has led policy makers to introduce control measures to limit international mobility and thus to limit the number of migrants entering our territory (Horsti, 2012). These exclusionary practices will be dealt with more extensively in the part on securitization. In connection with the work of Frontex, the agency can offer a simple solution by creating drama, fear or danger. Frontex comes in here as ‘the saviour’ of human lives and is often considered to be the legitimate agency in ‘solving’ the migration crisis. We are often convinced that what Frontex is doing is for the good of us.

This thesis argues that Frontex tends to dramatize the situation in the media in order to legitimize its actions. As said before, Frontex presents itself to be the guarantor of safety. This can be observed in the following sentence: ‘A Frontex boat directs migrants on a dinghy to safety last year’ (Frontex, 2017: 679). Moreover, they often exaggerate their SAR (search and rescue) operations in the media. This can be illustrated by the following quotes: ‘On Monday night a rubber boat with 106 sub-Saharan migrants was rescued by the Italian Coast Guard, which conducted a dramatic search and rescue operation 120 NM from Lampedusa’ (Frontex, 2015: 53). ‘Another terrible tragedy occurred in the Mediterranean’ (Frontex, 2015: 66). ‘I am deeply moved by this tragedy. The 12-metre rubber dinghies with more than a hundred people crammed aboard are no match for the massive waves nearly as high as a three-story building,’ Leggeri said’ (Frontex, 2015: 81). Firstly, they refer to a ‘dramatic’ SAR operation. Secondly, they refer to ‘a terrible tragedy’. Finally, in the second last sentence of the last quote he takes an emotional approach towards the situation by expressing his sympathy for ‘the tragedy’. The sentence that follows-up seems to dramatize the amount of people and the weather conditions that the migrants faced on their way to Europe. It should be noted that the weather conditions are often expressed extensively in the press releases. The same is true for the following sentence: ‘When I was in Sicily last week, I saw in person how dangerous the Mediterranean Sea can be in the winter. Venturing

out on small rubber boats in high winds and such low temperatures puts all the people aboard in grave danger,” Leggeri said” (Frontex, 2015: 93). They are talking about the dangerousness of the sea in winter and about high winds and low temperatures. Not only the weather conditions are addressed in this sentence, but as well the consequence of this type of weather, which is death. They are not specifically referring to death though, yet they are talking about ‘grave danger’, but death as being the consequence can be implied. Death is explicitly stated though in the following statement: “This was a very dark week. We are deeply saddened by the deaths of migrants near the Libyan shore and in the lorry in Austria” (Frontex, 2015: 312). In this case, the reference to a ‘very dark week’ and the statement of ‘deeply saddened by the deaths’ seems to exaggerate the story. The reason behind this could be to show the seriousness of the matter in order to legitimize the actions of Frontex to save lives. This will be explained in detail in the section on humanitarianization. Another call for action is legitimized in the following quote: “Most of the migrants were rescued from unseaworthy rubber dinghies off the Libyan coast, although some of them were on board wooden boats and fishing vessels. These boats were in poor condition and filled well over their capacity” (Frontex, 2016: 368). Due to the unseaworthiness of the boats, Frontex had a reason to intervene and save the ‘vulnerable’ people on these vessels.

In conclusion, this section has interpreted that Frontex tends to dramatize the refugee crisis in order to legitimize its intervention in the Mediterranean. The agency can offer a simple solution by creating drama, fear or danger, since Frontex can respond as the ‘saviour’ of human lives and EU borders. Moreover, the exaggerations that can be observed in the press releases can serve the purpose of depicting the seriousness of the matter, which legitimizes Frontex’s role to take action in turn. What is more, this section sometimes referred to exclusionary and securitizing practices. It is to the visibility of the securitization rhetoric that the next paragraph will turn.

## **4.2. SECURITIZATION**

As a reminder and as addressed in the theoretical framework, securitization of migration refers to “a process wherein an urgent ‘threat’ mobilizes and legitimizes legislation and policies that would not otherwise be accepted” (Horsti, 2012, p. 299). Bigo (2002) says that governments are promoting a rhetoric of security and risk, which is influenced by agents that enhanced their surveillance capacities. An example of such an agent is Frontex, which definitely promotes a rhetoric of security and risk. Right before the refugee crisis, Frontex stated: “The role of Frontex is key to ensure effective border control in the Mediterranean region” (Europa.eu, 2014: 635). In this sentence, they point to their perceived ‘key’ role in controlling the borders of the European Union. One could argue that the interpretation of the goal of this sentence is an attempt to increase their power and authority, for if Frontex does not present itself as being crucial in border management, they will not get funding of the European Union and then they will not be able to do their job. What is more, at the start of the refugee crisis, Frontex published: “The record number of migrants detected at the external borders of the EU had several

implications for border-control authorities and EU internal security” (Frontex, 2015: 191). The wording ‘the record number of migrants’ seems to give extra weight to the amount of migrants. Moreover, by means of referring to ‘several implications’, Frontex points to the perceived risk that the enormous amount of migrants can cause to the European Union. This sentence can be interpreted again as an attempt to increase their authority, since they do not gain power and authority if there is no threat to respond to.

In their press releases, Frontex is often referring to undocumented migration in particular. This can be retrieved from the following statement: “The facilitation of illegal migration remains a significant threat to the EU external borders. Detections of facilitators rose from 7 252 in 2013 to 10 234 in 2014” (Frontex, 2015: 198). Illegal migration is presented as a ‘significant threat’ here and this threat seems to increase when looking at the numbers. The reason for presenting an increment in the flow of illegal migration can be interpreted as adding urgency to the introduction of a solution that can be provided via Frontex’s border control, which in turn legitimizes its role. Frontex adds that “... not knowing who is travelling within the EU is a vulnerability for EU internal security” (Frontex, 2015: 196). This is an obvious securitization logic, which is used by the providers of security, such as Frontex, in order to confirm the importance of their role as providers of protection and security, according to Bigo (2002). Next to presenting illegal migration as a threat to the European Union, terrorism is often presented as an emergency that needs to be fought. This is true for the following sentence: “Overall, there is an underlying threat of terrorism-related travel movements especially due to the appeal of the Syrian conflict to both idealist and radicalised youths” (Frontex, 2015: 216). In this case, it is the threat of terrorism leading to this securitization logic and securitising practices. The reference to the wording ‘radicalised youth’ can be interpreted as an attempt to present them as being dangerous, which increases the demand to keep them out of the European Union. Moreover, Frontex adds that “it is possible that these foreign terrorist fighters use irregular migration routes or facilitation networks” (Frontex, 2018: 616). This quote seems to imply a demand to increase the monitoring of irregular migration routes in order to detect these terrorists, since they are supposed to use these routes. Thus, this rhetoric again legitimizes the role of Frontex, since Frontex is needed to monitor these routes and to guarantee extra surveillance.

The rhetoric of securitization is still present in 2018, when operation ‘Themis’ is about to start to execute. A Maltese newspaper published in January 2018: “It is envisaged that the security component of Operation Themis will include steps aimed at detecting foreign fighters and other terrorist threats at the external borders. We need to be better equipped to prevent criminal groups that try to enter the EU undetected. This is crucial for the internal security of the European Union,” Leggeri maintained” (Malta Today, 2018: 742). For this reason, “Themis will perform more security checks to gather information on terrorism and organized crime” (Open Media Hub, 2018: 804). These two quotes point to a demand for more securitising practices, implying an increase in securitization rhetoric, which seems to confirm the first hypothesis of the thesis. According to the previous quotes, ‘steps’ will be taken in

operation 'Themis', which refers to an increase in surveillance in order to detect threats at the borders of the EU. Moreover, there is aimed at a 'better equipment', which reflects again a demand for more securitization. This increased securitization logic is justified in the last quote of Malta Today, as interpreted in this thesis, which says that more securitising practices are crucial for the internal security of the EU. The word 'crucial' leads to the interpretation that increased securitization is the only way to keep threats out of the European Union. It is stated as if it is a matter of fact that surveillance is needed. In turn, this legitimizes the role of Frontex in operation 'Themis', since this agency is responsible for performing more security checks in order to combat 'organized crime', as stated by Open Media Hub. Smugglers can be seen to be part of this organized crime and Frontex often represents smugglers rather negatively.

All in all, Frontex attempts to increase their power and authority by means of highlighting their perceived 'key' role in controlling the borders of the EU and by means of depicting migrants as a 'threat' that they need to respond to. Frontex's role is legitimized in the media via this securitization rhetoric by firstly presenting an increment in the flow of illegal migration, which implies the requirement of border control by Frontex. Secondly, terrorism is used as a generator of a demand to increase the monitoring of irregular migration routes. This legitimizes the role of Frontex, since Frontex is needed to monitor these routes and to guarantee extra surveillance in order to detect terrorists. In 2018, a clear intensification of the securitization logic can be observed, since there is pointed to an increment in securitising practices under operation 'Themis' in order to protect the internal security of the EU. This results in the confirmation of the first hypothesis, which reads: an intensification of the securitization rhetoric can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015. The next section will be concerned with the negative representation of smugglers, which is part of securitization, as introduced before.

#### **4.2.1. 'GOOD GUYS' VS. 'BAD GUYS'**

What can be observed in many press releases of and on Frontex is that smugglers are blackwashed. Smugglers are depicted as the 'bad guys', whereas the members of Frontex are presented as the 'good guys'. This can be illustrated with the following quote: "The fact that people smugglers put so many migrants on a small rubber boat in such appalling weather conditions only demonstrates their increasing ruthlessness and willingness to put profit over human lives," said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri. "I would like to praise the courage and determination of the Italian Coast Guard officers who risked their lives to conduct such a complex and risky operation," he added" (Frontex, 2015: 66). Here, it is clearly visible that smugglers are represented as being associated with 'ruthlessness' and the 'willingness to put profit over human lives', while the 'rescuers' are connected to 'courageousness' and 'determination'. According to this quote, the rescuers are supposed to risk their lives in order to save the vulnerable migrants from 'appalling' weather conditions. By presenting these weather conditions and

the negative traits of the smugglers, Frontex can respond and act as the saviour in this situation. The same is true for the following quote, which has been published on the Frontex website: “Although border control authorities continued to save the lives of thousands of people, smugglers increasingly used unsafe boats, putting migrants in greater danger” (Frontex, 2015: 226). In this sentence, the distinction between ‘good guys’, who are continuing their job as live saviours, and ‘bad guys’, who are increasingly putting migrants in greater danger, is visible again. Thus, this thesis interprets this rhetoric as creating fear by depicting smugglers as dangerous or as ‘bad guys’, so that Frontex can respond and act as the ‘good guys’, who are required to save lives.

Another means of presenting smugglers in a negative way is shedding a light on their violence. In line with this, Frontex states in February 2015: “Smugglers who organised the operation forced them at gunpoint onto the inflatable rafts. The survivors told officials that the smugglers threatened to shoot on the spot anyone who refused to get into the four inflatable rafts” (Frontex, 2015: 101). Here, Frontex makes it seem as if migrants make the crossing to Europe involuntarily. What is more, they are supposed to be forced onto the boats. This seems to be an aim to show how bad smugglers actually are, by depicting their specific actions. The same can be said about the next quote: “These stories point to an awful crime. The criminals threatened the migrants with violence to board these flimsy rubber boats, knowing very well that the chances of their survival in such difficult weather conditions were slim,” said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri. “In this terrifying tragedy one can only wonder whether for these criminal this was a terrible accident, or part of a deliberate strategy”- he concluded” (Frontex, 2015: 110). These two quotes make it look as if smugglers are always violent and dangerous, thus they are blackwashed. Frontex even questions the nature of the accident, since they suspect it to be part of a strategy, which aims at showing the perceived ‘ruthlessness’ of smugglers another time. It could be interpreted that this blackwashing serves a purpose, which is avoiding to look critically at the actions of Frontex itself. Pointing fingers at bad behaviour leads to a focus on the smugglers, so that Frontex does not get the attention for its own negative actions.

Another important thing that should be noted is that Frontex is often referring to the smuggling practices as a ‘business’. This can be retrieved from the following sentence: “People-smuggling by sea became a year-round business” (Frontex, 2014: 4). Yet, when assessing this wording critically, it can be said that the securitization of Frontex is a business as well, since they are installing cameras, building walls and they are getting more advanced vessels. Frontex is as well often referring to the combat of these ‘illegal’ businesses. This is highlighted in the following quote: “We will work closely with NATO and its members to cooperate in doing all we can to combat the criminals making billions of euros from smuggling desperate people from Turkey to Greece,” said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri” (Frontex, 2016: 342). Yet, a lot of money is involved in the ‘border control business’ of Frontex as well, but no attention is given to this subject. This thesis interprets this kind of rhetoric as turning a blind eye to their part of the business by focusing on the business of the smugglers. What is more, Frontex is often referring to the amount of money that is involved in the business in order to depict the seriousness of

the problem. In the following sentence, they point to a ‘multi-million-euro’ business: ‘‘The unprecedented number of migrants also encouraged facilitators to use cargo ships to smuggle them at a large scale. This is a multi-million-euro business for organised crime groups, which is likely to be replicated in other departure countries’’ (Frontex, 2015: 229). This sentence can be interpreted as a warning and as an incentive to take action in order to prevent criminals to replicate it in other departure countries. This legitimizes the role of Frontex again, since Frontex needs to be the agency that prevents the criminals to do their job in other departure countries.

When the refugee crisis proceeds, the rhetoric of Frontex is pointing to a willingness to expand the combat of the smuggling networks. In June 2017, Frontex publishes: ‘‘Over the past two years, smugglers operating in Libya have made it more dangerous for migrants, cramming more people onto increasingly unseaworthy rubber dinghies. They also give them barely enough water and fuel to leave Libyan territorial waters and remove the engines as they approach international waters to reuse them. While saving lives is a priority, dismantling people-smuggling networks operating in Libya is part of our mission’’ (Frontex, 2017: 488). In these sentences, they are depicting the increased dangerousness for the migrants due to the reckless behaviour of smugglers. Frontex depicts the migrants as victims, by stating that they were not provided with enough water. It should be noted that this victimization (as part of humanitarianization) is as well an important rhetoric used by Frontex, yet this topic will be discussed in the next paragraph. One month later, in July 2017, Frontex states: ‘‘Setting off such high numbers of boats at the same time by the Libyan smugglers is extremely worrying. In the latest years smugglers often launched massive number of boats all at the same time, but this year we are witnessing levels never registered before in short periods of time,’’ said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri’’ (Frontex, 2017: 484). In this quote, it seems as if the wordings of ‘levels as never registered before in short periods of time’ and ‘massive number of boats’ want to create urgency. They state that the smuggling business is even more worrying in 2017 compared to the previous year, which can be interpreted as an aim to generate an intensification in Frontex’s role in combatting people smuggling networks. This could be one of the reasons for the introduction of operation ‘Themis’, since operation ‘Triton’ did not work well enough to tackle smuggling extensively. Open Media Hub states in March 2018: ‘‘Tackling smuggling and combatting cross-border crime is extra important in operation Themis’’ (Open Media Hub, 2018: 813).

Altogether, Frontex benefits from blackwashing the smugglers (‘the bad guys’), since the agency can then respond and act as the saviour (‘the good guys’) in order to keep the ‘vulnerable’ migrants out of the hands of the ‘ruthless’ men, which legitimizes its role to take action. Furthermore, the perceived importance of its role is intensified when time passes, since the smuggling business is perceived to become more worrying. The next paragraph will deal with another rhetoric that Frontex is promoting, which is humanitarianization.



### 4.3. HUMANITARIANIZATION

As introduced in the theoretical framework, representations in the media can highlight the humanitarian discourse of the migrant's lives, by means of taking an emotional approach in phrasing the story. Related to this humanitarian discourse is victimization, which is "a process whereby migrants are presented as victims either of their culture, criminal smugglers, or sometimes the immigration regimes of Europe" (Horsti, 2012, p. 299). This section will start with analysing victimization in the press releases, since this kind of rhetoric is highly present in Frontex's media articles. Frontex often explicitly refers to children, (pregnant) women, or so-called 'distressed' people as being the great victims of the refugee crisis. In January 2015, Frontex publishes: "Among those in need of assistance are women (some pregnant) and about 60 children" (Frontex, 2015: 15). It can be argued that the reference to the pregnancy of women makes the victimization even heavier, since pregnant women are perceived to be vulnerable. Moreover, one could argue that the reference to a specific amount of children even leads to a greater incentive to take action, since children are perceived to be innocent and they do not know yet how to take care of themselves. In line with Horsti (2012), it can be said that especially women and children are presented as the victims of criminal smugglers or perhaps even of the immigration regimes of Europe. They are perceived to be among the most exposed and unprotected. Another reference to women and children was made in July 2015: "Among the rescued migrants there were 133 women and 27 children. Members of the crew gave plush toys, which they brought from Norway, to the children aboard. Some members of the crew spoke to their own kids at home to see what they can do to help the migrant children our ship would rescue. Together they decided to bring teddy bears. There's plenty of them in Norway and these kids need to feel like real children," said Erling Olstad, commander of Siem Pilot" (Frontex, 2015: 274). It can be argued that this quote serves two purposes. The first one is has to do with the mentioning of specific numbers of both the rescued children and women, for the mentioning of specifics can give the story more credibility, which is convenient for Frontex. Moreover, mentioning high numbers could increase the incentive for taking action, which is as well useful for Frontex, since they are responsible for this and this gives them a reason to intervene. One could argue that the second purpose of this quote is to depict the kindness of Frontex's staff, since they use a lot of words to say that the staff brought teddy bears for the children. Again, they are represented as the 'good guys'. A last quote that is considered to be striking is the following: "On Sunday morning one of the rescued migrants gave birth to a baby boy. The child and his mother, along with a family with two small children, were evacuated to a hospital on the island of Lampedusa by the Italian Coast Guard" (Frontex, 2016: 428). It is argued that the reference to a new born child serves a purpose, which is again to make the story more dramatic in order to evoke reactions and actions. The last three quotes spoke about the vulnerability of migrants (women and children in particular) at sea, yet Frontex mentions as well the vulnerable situation of migrants in general in their home country. This can be illustrated by means of the following quote: "In Libya, migrants are in an extremely vulnerable situation, especially those in areas affected

by the fighting. Migrants in Libya also face arbitrary detention and very poor conditions of detention, marked by overcrowding, poor sanitation and exploitation” (Frontex, 2015: 202). Here, migrants are represented as victims of the economic and political situation of their home country, as argued in line with Horsti (2012).

Next to presenting migrants as sole victims, the press releases tend to highlight the deaths of migrants. As already addressed in the theoretical framework, Moreno-Lax (2017, p. 130) argues that ‘migrants are doubly victimized, as subjects of smuggling/trafficking and as shipwrecked’, since the crossing can lead to death. In May 2015, The Conversation published: ‘Europe in the past few weeks has been shocked by a record high in the number of migrants dying in the Mediterranean Sea’ (The Conversation, 2015: 643). The wording of ‘the record high number’ can be projected on the context in which this thesis is grounded, which is an intense refugee crisis. This ‘record high number’ resulted in the situation being regarded as a crisis. Another quote from which the death of migrants can be retrieved is the following: ‘This led to three fatal incidents where wooden boats capsized. So far, more than 50 bodies had been recovered and hundreds more people are feared drowned, based on unconfirmed statements by the surviving migrants’ (Frontex, 2016: 370). What can be noticed in this quote is the extensive use of adjectives which seems to exaggerate the story. They state for instance, ‘fatal’ incidents, ‘wooden’ boats and ‘surviving’ migrants and it is argued that they aim to make the story more dramatic. This could serve the purpose of preventing migrants from coming by addressing the risk of the crossing. Yet, it could also be a means to justify the interference of Frontex for the agency can then execute its role as ‘saviour’. Another striking thing that should be noted in this section is that Frontex refers in many press releases to the cause of the death, which is mostly hypothermia. This can be illustrated by the following quote: ‘The Italian Coast Guard assisted by vessels participating in the Operation Triton rescued 105 people on one of the vessels on Monday, although 29 of them died on hypothermia’ (Frontex, 2015: 104). In this quote, the specific numbers can be noticed as well. This thesis argues that the reason for this is to depict the seriousness of the refugee crisis and to create a sense of urgency in dealing with this perceived problem, which benefits Frontex.

Besides the victimization, this section wants to address the representation of the Frontex staff as the ‘good guys’. This has already been partly addressed in the section on the negative representation of smugglers, yet it is important to note with regard to humanitarianization as well. In two striking press releases, Frontex talks about its ‘sacrifice’ of their spare time in order to save lives and assist the refugees. One of these examples says: ‘Christmas, it is safe to predict, will be no holiday for the border guards engaged in the central Mediterranean’ (Frontex, 2014: 13). The first thing that should be noted is that this article is released on Christmas evening, which is interpreted as serving the purpose of getting attention. Furthermore, the quote is interpreted to aim at presenting Frontex’s staff as the ‘good guys’, since they are said to sacrifice their Christmas in order to save the lives of the ‘many vulnerable people’. The same can be said about the following quote: ‘All vessels currently deployed in operation Triton participated in search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean over the holiday weekend. On

Saturday, six vessels deployed by Frontex rescued more than 600 migrants. The rescue operations continued on Sunday, when the Frontex-deployed Norwegian Siem Pilot and other vessels participating in operation Triton saved hundreds of migrants” (Frontex, 2017: 449). In this quote, Frontex states again that the agency is working in the Easter holiday weekend and that it has been using all its vessels. Do they want to show how active and motivated they are to save lives? Or do they want to get attention for their positive actions in order to make up for the human rights violations that the agency has been accused of? Another important thing to note in line with the representation of the Frontex staff as the ‘good guys’ is that Frontex often uses specific numbers of people that have been rescued. This is true for the following sentence: “Between January and December 2016, assets deployed by Frontex to JO Triton were involved in the rescue of 48800 people” (Frontex, 2016: 421). Furthermore, “Some 13 800 migrants were rescued in the Central Mediterranean last week in nearly 90 search and rescue operations. All vessels and aircraft deployed by Frontex in the area took part in the operations, saving almost 5 000 lives” (Frontex, 2016: 364). In the last quote, Frontex combines its presentation of a ‘good guy’ by saying that the agency used all their means to save lives and it uses specific numbers of people that have been saved. This thesis interprets this quote as trying to show that their work is morally right and relevant, since they contribute to saving the lives of many people. Furthermore, the mentioning of specific numbers can serve the purpose of making the story more trustworthy, since it seems to be based on factual numbers.

What is more, connected to humanitarianization as a legitimizing strategy is the mentioning of human rights. Yet, this reference to human rights is not present in many press releases. Only in February 2016, they publish: “Of course, we’ll make sure that all our actions will continue to respect the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,” Leggeri added” (Frontex, 2016: 345). This is the first time that they are mentioning human rights. Furthermore, in April 2016, they publish an article with the title “Third Annual Report of Frontex Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights published”. The reason of publishing these two articles concerning human rights could be to show their compliance with human rights. They received a lot of criticism from human rights organizations and pro-migrant parties, since they were considered not to respect human rights in their operations. Thus, these two articles are interpreted to serve the purpose of showing the audience that they are complying with human rights standards and do whatever they can to respect them.

The last subject that this section on humanitarianization wants to address is the observed contradiction of priorities in the press releases of and on Frontex. Frontex’s mandate is perceived to be border control, thus border control should be their main priority. Yet, Frontex is often referring to saving lives as their priority. This can be illustrated by means of the following quote: “That said, saving lives is always a priority for Frontex. “There is great suffering out there, among a great many vulnerable people,” says Gil Arias Fernandez, Frontex Executive Director “so of course we do whatever we can” (Frontex, 2014: 11). They state it as if it is a matter of fact to save lives, by saying ‘of course we do whatever we can’. Moreover, the story is exaggerated by saying that there is ‘great suffering’, which

could aim at justifying Frontex's role in saving lives. However, it can be argued that this results in confusion on Frontex's priorities. In 2016, Frontex still seems not sure which of their tasks is supreme. Accordingly, they state: "While the primary focus of Operation Triton, which was launched in November 2014, is border control and surveillance, search and rescue remains a priority for the agency. Since the beginning of the operation, Frontex vessels and aircrafts have on regularly been redirected by the Italian Coast Guard to assist migrants in distress" (Frontex, 2016: 408). This confusion of priorities can be linked to the work of Moreno-Lax (2017), as addressed in the theoretical framework, since he argues that "Triton's contribution to saving lives was highlighted as a major legitimizing factor" (Moreno-Lax, 2017, p. 126). Thus, the perceived important role of Frontex in saving lives serves as a legitimizing factor by mentioning it as a priority. In 2018, the perceived urgency of Frontex being engaged in saving lives, reaches its climax. This can be retrieved from the following quote: "At the same time, border-control authorities are expected to be increasingly engaged in search and rescue operations covering vast areas of the Mediterranean Sea, as well as being the first point of contact for a growing number of vulnerable persons" (Frontex, 2018: 593). This points to an increment of the humanitarian discourse, since it is said that SAR operations needs to gain more engagement of border-control authorities. Does this point to the supremacy of saving lives compared to border control? Moreover, by mentioning the "growing number of vulnerable people", Frontex seems to want to make the situation more urgent and to state that the refugee crisis is far from over. Thus, there is still work to do. This thesis interprets this quote as a growing attempt to legitimize their role, since there is still a growing number of people that needs its assistance. This points to a confirmation of hypothesis 2a, which says that an intensification of language pointing to humanitarianization can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015. Moreover, this can be backed up by Chillaud (2016), who argues that Frontex uses this humanitarian rhetoric, and thus the protection of migrants, in order to justify their 'exceptional' control measures.

In sum, humanitarianization seems to be a highly legitimizing strategy since the refugee crisis of 2015. References to victims of the refugee crisis, which tend to be women and children, and references to deaths are made in order to increase Frontex's incentive to take action and thus to legitimize their role as 'life saviours'. What is more, in this role of 'life saviours', they tend to present themselves as 'good guys' who do whatever they can in order to save lives. They even state it as their priority, which serves as a legitimizing factor.

#### **4.4. MILITARIZATION**

As stated in the theoretical framework, Moreno-Lax (2017, p. 132) builds on this humanitarianization by saying that "the minimalist humanitarianism infused in European border work gives way to a new, militaristic type of intervention through the mobilization of 'war-like' images." It should be noted that these typical 'war-like' imagines are not extensively visible in the press releases on Frontex since the

refugee crisis. Yet, Chillaud (2016) talks about military vocabulary, such as ‘intelligence’, ‘joint operation’ and ‘crime’, which can be observed to some extent in the press releases since the refugee crisis. In October 2016, Frontex talks about an expansion of the operational focus of Triton with regard to cross border crime: “The operational focus of joint operation Triton has expanded to include other forms of cross border crime. Apart from numerous arrest of people smugglers, the assets deployed by the agency increasingly contribute to the detections of drug smuggling, illegal fishing and maritime pollution” (Frontex, 2016: 413). Apparently, Frontex perceived the threat of cross border crime to be so high that the operational focus needed to expand. It could as well be that they want to justify their surveillance measures by stating that it has increased. This is in line what Chillaud (2016) says, since he argues that “it seems that the military vocabulary used by Frontex have an aim of dramatising the political situation and to give weight to the (security) legitimacy of the agency given the traditional role of military in addressing security issues” (Chillaud, 2016, p. 33). The following quote concerns the collection of intelligence, which is another connection to Chillaud (2016) when he talks about the ‘military’ vocabulary used by Frontex: “Debriefing officers collect intelligence about people smuggling networks operating in Libya and other African countries on the smuggling routes” (Frontex, 2016: 417). Moreover, “within Operation Triton, Frontex deploys officers who collect intelligence about the activities of the smugglers which the agency shares with Italian authorities and Europol for investigations and arrests,” said Fabrice Leggeri.” In this quote, militarization is connected to combatting smuggling networks and aims at increasing the amount of investigations, ultimately leading to arrests in order to combat cross border crime. When the refugee crisis proceeds, Frontex only increases this intelligence collection, which can be retrieved from a press release by Open Media Hub in March 2018: “The intelligence and information gathering will also be increased to help investigations on counter terrorism and organised crime, like drug smuggling” (Open Media Hub, 2018: 811). Yet, what should be noted is that Frontex does not consider itself as being a military organization. Accordingly, they state: “Sophia is a military operation, Frontex is a civilian organisation, supporting Italy with border control and law enforcement”, the board and coast agency spokesperson argues” (Open Media Hub, 2018: 800). It can be argued that this is a means to deny militarization. Yet, it could also be the reason for the militarization logic being less present in the press releases of and on Frontex compared to the rhetorics of humanitarianization and securitization, which can be indicated by the length of this paragraph. Connected to hypothesis 2b, which reads: an intensification of the militarization rhetoric can be detected in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015, cannot be confirmed, since no clear intensification in militarization logic can be observed since the refugee crisis of 2015. The reason for this could be that the usage of the militarization rhetoric does not benefit Frontex to the same extent as the logics of human humanitarianization and securitization do. This is why securitization and humanitarianization have been used to the detriment of militarization as a legitimizing factor.

This analysis aimed at exploring to what extent the rhetorics on securitization, humanitarianization and militarization are prominent in the press releases after the refugee crisis, starting in 2015. Moreover, sections on the representation of the refugee crisis, the representation of migrants and dramatization served to depict the context in a better way. In this analysis, the power structures that underlie the presence of these themes in the press releases on two Frontex operations have been uncovered. The next chapter will draw more general conclusions from this analysis and these conclusions will be connected to the research question. Furthermore, a discussion will be provided, addressing the unique aspects of this research and it will provide suggestions for future researchers on how to build further on this research in order to create new insights.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This Bachelor thesis has answered the research question: *How was the management of undocumented migration by Frontex legitimized in the media since the refugee crisis of 2015?* The thesis has hypothesized by means of three different hypotheses that an intensification could be observed in the rhetorics of securitization, humanitarianization and militarization after the refugee crisis, starting in 2015. After the establishment of these hypotheses, a critical media discourse analysis has been done in order to test these hypotheses. The results indicate that the management of undocumented migration by Frontex was legitimized in the media via a dramatized representation of the refugee crisis and the representation of migrants as being both ‘victims’ and ‘Others’ that need Frontex’s assistance. Moreover, an intensification in the rhetorics of securitization and humanitarianization as legitimization strategies could be observed in the press releases after the refugee crisis.

Concerning securitization, Frontex tends to attempt to increase their power and authority by means of highlighting their perceived ‘key’ role in controlling the borders of the EU and by means of depicting migrants as a ‘threat’ that they need to respond to. What is more, Frontex benefits from blackwashing the smugglers, since this justifies Frontex’s role to act as ‘the good guys’ in order to keep the migrants out of the hands of the smugglers. Furthermore, the perceived importance of its role is intensified when the refugee crisis proceeds, since the smuggling business is perceived to become more worrying. In 2018, a clear intensification of the securitization logic could be observed, since there was pointed to an increment in securitising practices under operation ‘Themis’ in order to protect the internal security of the EU. This implies a confirmation of the first hypothesis, which reads: an intensification of the securitization rhetoric can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015. Moreover, humanitarianization seems to be an increasingly legitimization strategy since the refugee crisis of 2015. References to the victims of the refugee crisis, which tend to be women and children, and references to deaths are made in order to increase Frontex’s incentive to take action and thus to legitimize their role as ‘life saviours’. When the refugee crisis proceeds, Frontex refers as well to a growing amount of vulnerable people and an increasing urgency to take action. This implies a confirmation of hypothesis 2a, which says that an intensification of language pointing to humanitarianization can be observed in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015. Finally, hypothesis 2b, which reads: an intensification of the militarization rhetoric can be detected in the press releases since the refugee crisis of 2015, needs to be rejected due to an underrepresentation of this rhetoric as a legitimization strategy compared to the visibility of securitization and humanitarianization. A clear intensification of the militarization logic since the refugee crisis can thus not be observed.

Reflecting on the research process, the conclusions of this Bachelor thesis have filled an important knowledge gap by positing a new and recent view on the representation of Frontex’s border management

by the media, since little academic research has focused on Frontex's public role in the media since the start of the refugee crisis, especially in connection with legitimization strategies. Moreover, this thesis has added to existing research in the sense that it has engaged in an analytical discussion of relevant scholarly works in the discussion about the legitimization and representation of two Frontex operations by the media. Finally, this thesis aimed at evoking a critical attitude of EU citizens on migration policies in general and particularly about Frontex's media representation. Another strength of the thesis is the high usability of the theories, since they could be well-connected to the Data Analysis in order to deepen the analysis. Yet, some weaknesses can be observed in the research process as well. First, the critical media discourse analysis required my own interpretation of the press releases. This implies that the results of the analysis might be influenced by my own background and beliefs, which affects the objectivity of the data. Secondly, the amount of legitimization strategies that have been distinguished in the research are quite limited. Therefore, I encourage future studies to investigate whether Frontex uses other legitimization strategies, building on the work of Reyes (2011). Moreover, it would be interesting for future studies to increase the time span in order to make the comparison of legitimization strategies before and after the refugee crisis more reliable.

Finally, this thesis advises EU citizens to critically assess EU policies on migration and particularly the representation of Frontex's border management by the media. As media consumers, we need to be constantly critical in assessing the messages that we receive, since the media is often representing issues in a certain way that is different from 'reality'. Furthermore, this thesis has challenged the current securitization of migration of the European Union, since it is argued that the focus on security is to the detriment of the focus on human rights. Therefore, this research encourages EU policy makers to reconsider human rights in EU border management, since the EU did not make significant amendments to its migration policy which fully cover human rights protection in the face of the refugee crisis. Thus, the EU should review its border management in order to ensure that a human rights-based focus is at the heart of its border-associated measures in order to meet the concerns and needs of the migrants who need our protection.



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**APPENDIX**