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The Politicisation of Security: Controversy, Mobilisation, Arena Shifting

Forum Editor: Linda Monsees
Queen Mary University of London

Abstract

This collection of essays engages with the special issue on politicisation that has been previously published in this journal. It highlights the contribution for the contemporary debate on security studies. The contributions furthermore point out several lines of further research.

Keywords

politicisation – security – theory – democracy – politics

Preface

In ERIS 5:3 at the end of 2018 we were pleased to publish a Special Issue, guest edited by Jonas Hagmann of ETH Zurich, Hendrik Hegemann of the University of Osnabruck and Andrew Neal of the University of Edinburgh. Its theme was ‘The Politicisation of Security: Controversy, Mobilisation, Arena Shifting’, and the collection arose from intensive conference and workshop interactions between the three guest editors, the collaborators who eventually produced the

articles which made up the Special Issue, and indeed the ERIS editorial team. The final product has attracted much interest, which is not surprising given that it looked to reverse the by now orthodox view that important areas of public life can become 'securitised' out of democratic politics – perhaps even out of all kinds of politics. The authors explored, in a range of theoretical and empirical contexts, how it is very difficult to concrete over political life, and how even when such attempts seem to have succeeded the new shoots of grass soon break through again, fertilised by the inherently contestable nature of ideas and practices, plus the surprising counter-moves which events like the Arab Spring or the Hong Kong riots can produce. The Special Issue used the three concepts of controversy, mobilisation and arena-shifting to bring out these ideas and practices, bringing out the normative as well as the analytic implications for the study of security.

Not long after the appearance of issue 5:3 we were approached by a further group of authors, headed by Linda Monsees of Queen Mary, University of London, who wished to develop the debate. Often such reactions consist of sharp disagreements, sometimes productive, but sometimes highly personal and much less so. This group of commentators, by contrast, was more concerned to tease out further the implications of the new line of thinking in the Special Issue, with special reference to its central concepts – viz the 'everyday', politicisation, sacralisation and the legal. What follows represents the product of both individual reflections and interaction within their group. ERIS is glad to promote further discussion of this important issue through publication of their innovative and constructive Review Forum.

Christopher Hill and Christian Lequesne

Editors in Chief

Politicisation and the Everyday

The ERIS special issue 'The Politicisation of Security: Controversy, Mobilisation, Arena Shifting' (Volume 6:2) is an excellent example of how to assemble pluralistic contributions revolving around one concept. While the resulting articles differ in methodology, conceptual approach and empirical scope the concept of politicisation is core to all analyses. The special issue (SI) nicely bridges (critical) security studies to political science and one hopes that it will be recognised beyond the field of Critical Security Studies. The Introduction to the issue sets out nicely the argument that looking at the politicisation of security tells us something not just about security politics but also about

democratic politics more generally. The SI thereby avoids the danger of collections that speak only to a very specialised audience. Rather than introducing yet another novel theme, the SI returns to a seemingly old-fashioned concept and shows the valuable work that can be done on fundamental questions regarding the relationship between politics and security, the state and the public. The concept of politicisation has previously been mostly discussed in the context of parliamentary politics and thus public policy and EU studies. Focusing on security allows us to understand how issues that are traditionally the prerogative of the executive can become part of (public) politics.

It is well established that security is often conceptualised as being the opposite to politics in the sense that a security framework legitimises extraordinary powers and privileges experts and technocratic politics.¹ The SI sets out to complicate this picture. For example, Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond's engagement with Sweden's feminist foreign policy shows how overlapping processes of de- and re-politicisation can shape security politics.² At the core of their analysis lies the way these dynamics shape a specific 'political rationality' of the state and its foreign policy. The authors argue that a re-politicisation of Swedish foreign policy led to a more politicised understanding of gender mainstreaming as can be observed in other international arenas. Following this interest in de- and re-politicisation, Dunn Cavelty and Leese discuss how 'privacy' can foster the politicisation of security. Dunn Cavelty and Leese emphasise the dimension of contestation which they define as the opening up of a space for deliberation.³ Importantly, they demonstrate that the mere observation of the politicisation of an issue – in this case surveillance – does not tell us much about the de-facto impact of politicisation. Indeed, while debate over privacy might help to politicise certain security practices that would otherwise remain hidden from public attention, state narratives about the need for such measures might still outweigh the attempts to politicise.

Bilgin introduces the concept of 'sacralisation' as another way in which politicisation moves can be countered. She argues that while the idea of the politics of security has been firmly established over recent decades, the sacred is still too often treated as being beyond politics.⁴ Yet the process of sacralisation can be conceptualised both as a mechanism that fosters the politicisation of an issue and one that can hamper public contestation. Bilgin thereby

1 Hagmann, Hegemann, & Neal, 2019.

2 Aggestam & Bergman Rosamond, 2019.

3 Dunn Cavelty & Leese, 2019, p. 52.

4 Bilgin, 2019, p. 99.

investigates the configurations in a specific instance that led to a distinct form of security politics whereby public contestation was effectively silenced.

Even though some of the authors of the SI draw on examples outside parliamentary politics, for them politicisation still refers to the relation between government and the public (broadly understood). From this perspective politicisation is better than de-politicisation: not only because politicisation makes an issue a concern for the public but also because it multiplies the possibilities of public scrutiny. This is the starting point for Neal's discussion of the increasing volume of parliamentary activity when it comes to security politics.⁵ Importantly, however, as the editors note in their Introduction, politicisation can also have negative effects for society.⁶ Yet the SI does not discuss these negative effects of politicisation in any depth. It thereby confirms the existing bias in politicisation research, namely the normative assumption that politicisation – that is, more politics – is always better.⁷ Critical security studies equally prioritise more politics and less security.⁸

In contrast, a willingness to engage with the idea of 'too much' politics in security practices would be not only empirically interesting but also capable of yielding interesting conceptual insights. Outside the realm of security it is easy to see that too stark a politicisation of issues such as ethnicity or gender can have detrimental effects for societies. For example, avoiding debate on issues such as capital punishment is a way of preventing the creation of reactionary politics, in the sense of campaigns to reverse the gains made by progressive liberal politics over many years. In this context it would have thus been interesting to read more about the possibilities of 'too much politics' in a security context. Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond criticise for example the technocratic character of Swedish foreign policy and especially the influence of gender mainstreaming. However, it might also be the case that it is only because foreign policy is depoliticised to a certain degree that a feminist agenda becomes possible. One can easily see that the politicisation of (feminist) foreign policy might easily lead to a backlash, as van Rythoven describes. Indeed, van Rythoven's very conceptualisation of 'backlash' opens up the space to discuss the possible negative effects of security politicisation, if combined with a reactionary agenda.

5 Neal, 2019.

6 Hagmann, Hegemann, & Neal, 2019, p. 6, 16.

7 Hay, 2014.

8 Hagman, Hegemann & Neal, 2019, p. 15.

Van Rythoven focuses on everyday emotional reactions to political events and the possibility of a backlash. He states: 'More than momentary outbursts, the significance of these emotional episodes stems from their capacity to politicise security claims and by making them intensely controversial'.⁹ 'Controversies' are one of the three core dynamics Hagmann et al. introduce. However, from their perspective controversies always refer back to state politics. Ultimately, the significance of politicisation is measured according to its ability to spark a public deliberation that can then lead to the alteration of policies. This assumption also underlies the account of politicisation given by Dunn Caveltly and Leese, and their understanding of public deliberation. But politicisation in the sense of the mere creation of controversy does not necessarily have to be conceptualised as something that derives only from state politics.¹⁰ Looking at other forms of politics that do not take their point of reference from the nation state allows us to engage more deeply with the possible negative effects of politicisation. A focus on the everyday permits a rethinking of the underlying concept of politics in the context of the politicisation of security, as van Rythoven's article demonstrates. [Such a conceptual vantage point makes it possible to include modes of politicisation that do not take governmental institutions as their point of reference. Most examples of 'everyday' politicisation ultimately argue for the significance of these politicisation moves by referring to the impact on policies or state actors].

Focusing on emotions is one way to try to think about politicisation by including politics beyond or below the nation-state.¹¹ Fostering this research agenda in turn allows us to consider how the politicisation of everyday phenomena can have negative effects for society, by fostering reactionary political agendas. The real value of a focus on politicisation lies then not only in the way it brings issues into the political arena which governments would rather suppress, but more generally in the way it traces how controversies emerge and can be conceptualised as political. The SI demonstrates the importance of both conceptual and empirical work in helping us to understand the impact of politicisation not only on politics but also on society.

Linda Monsees

Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

l.monsees@qmul.ac.uk

9 van Rythoven, 2019 p. 151.

10 Marres, 2012.

11 Christensen and Liebetrau, 2019.

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The promise of “politicisation” in security studies

Efforts to analyse 'security as politics'¹² have essential contributions to make to our understanding of security governance. But they have typically come to their objective quite obliquely, in a dialogue that has been centred on the terms of the widely influential speech-act concept of securitisation. The Copenhagen School¹³ produced an elegant theory that addressed the sub-disciplinary 'widening debate' of the 1990s in a way that struck a chord with IR's then constructivist zeitgeist. To those not approaching analysing security governance from the context of these IR sub-disciplinary debates, it may be far from immediately clear why one should draw so heavily from linguistics – rather than from the discipline dedicated to domestic politics – to examine

¹² Neal, 2019.

¹³ Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998; Wæver, 1995.

why and how domestic political systems socially negotiate issues around security. Still, those most prominently arguing that the Copenhagen School's paradigmatic separation of security and 'normal' politics cannot truly be maintained¹⁴ have tended to critique past securitisation theory for how it operationalises or interprets its central categories (e.g. speaker, audience, exception). But were those concepts, rather than ones drawn more from political study, truly the most relevant ones to start with? Despite a wide questioning of security's ontological exceptionalism from 'normal' politics, the attending claim that a distinct securitisation theory is therefore necessary has seen much less explicit challenge. When incorporated in security analysis, political studies concepts have tended to be used to plug gaps in a deficient securitisation theory, rather than given a lead role in analysing securitisation processes.¹⁵ If security is inseparable from 'normal' politics, our grasp of the implications has remained limited.

In this muddled debate, *ERIS*'s special issue on 'the politicisation of security' makes a refreshingly full-throated collective intervention. By employing a 'politicisation' concept drawn from political science, "[r]ather than focusing on the diverse ways in which security limits politics, the contributors address the varied forms and modes of politics that increasingly emerge in and around security".¹⁶ This 'politicisation' lens aims to invert the limiting terms of the analysis, particularly in how it is not principally concerned with the specific refinement or rebuttal of previous securitisation tropes, but aims chiefly to take account of an empirically evident range of indeterminate security-related struggles. Through treating the multiplicity of politics around security as a natural basis for new theorisation, rather than data to be fitted into previous theoretical presumptions about the key actors or processes that surround security in political life, the politicisation concept represents an important new angle in security analysis.

This is partly so because it offers a productive new perspective on defining what can be meaningfully analysed as 'security'. As Dunn Cavelty and Leese write in their contribution, a key aspect of the politicisation lens is that, within it, security-related controversies are indeterminate, "without foregone conclusions as to how they are going to be handled".¹⁷ This is an important intervention with regard to securitisation concepts which have typically suggested that any issue can possibly be security, but only in particular ways.

14 e.g. Balzacq, 2005; Doty, 2009; Huysmans, 2008.

15 Slaven 2016, p. 34.

16 Hagmann, Hegemann, and Neal, 2018, p. 5.

17 Dunn Cavelty and Leese, 2018, p. 50.

While defining security is certainly important, the effort has often stifled rather than enhanced analysis of security related political phenomena. The assumption that certain kinds of claims (security ones, marked by urgency and threat) necessarily produce, if anything, only certain kinds of political responses (elevation beyond the merely political agenda, or the licensing of increased security practices) has melded together particular logics, processes, actors, and effects around security, being seen to axiomatically accompany each other. One of the great opportunities offered by the politicisation lens is to disentangle these phenomena – to see how security logics may be meaningfully present in political contestation, without necessarily leading to the confirmation of exceptional treatment. Against the ontological division between politics and security, the politicisation lens “is capable of breaking this conceptual dichotomy... [A]n issue can very well be about security and at the same time remain within the regular sphere of politics, without an automatic escalation to the extraordinary”.¹⁸ This allows a much broader investigation into the kinds of effects that claims which clearly relate to security may have upon politics – an investigation which reflects a renewed dedication to empirics. The breadth it permits is reflected clearly in the diversity of the special issue’s contributions.

Certainly, the politicisation viewpoint will be open to criticism from fore-running perspectives in constructivist and critical security studies, in part due to this position it takes on questions such as defining ‘security’. Viewed from the other side, however, how far exactly does it advance the project of ‘security as politics’? If it helps to break the dichotomy between security and politics, how much insight is this perspective then poised to unlock?

In assessing the analytical potential of ‘politicisation’, the ‘-isation’ is of particular significance. Introducing politicisation as a key lens through which to view security politics is a neat intervention precisely because it justifies itself by observing an empirical trend of “a broader range of political controversy, activity, and actors linked to security”, as the guest editors write.¹⁹ Here, the need for new theoretical perspectives follows from evident political developments, rather than from an abstracted ontological debate about security and the political. But as a result, such a move is more ambiguous about its position toward the place of ‘normal’ politics in security than might meet the eye. If some new perspective, inviting in concepts from political studies, is necessary and appropriate for shedding light on increasing empirical evidence of security being contested in ‘normal’ arenas, does this make previous securitisation

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁹ Hagmann, Hegemann and Neal 2018, p. 5.

theory implicitly valid for analysing the opposite – instances of a narrower range of political controversy, less activity, and fewer actors linked to security? The ‘politicisation’ angle seems to bracket this question, thus cannily inviting fewer objections than it might otherwise. Yet, it is hard to avoid the feeling that this question is fundamental. At base, the debate over whether security can really be analytically separated from the ‘merely’ (or normally) political has always been an ontological one. Bilgin offers the reflection, echoed by other contributors, that, “On one level, to speak of politicising security is a misnomer. Security is always already political.”²⁰ If the response to this recognition is to embrace further concepts from political study in order to shed light on the politics of security, why should this focus only on cases that appear on one side of a ‘politicisation’ process marked by particular sorts of evidence – more contestation, actors, arenas? In particular, the politicisation view seems to contain a clear bias toward *visible* political contestations about security. But given that security can always, in principle, break into ‘normal’, publicly visible political agendas and decision-making arenas, there equally must be political considerations – subject to investigation by similar approaches – in *not* contesting security, *not* involving new institutional venues, *not* problematising a securitised status quo.

Indeed, it behoves any ‘security as politics’ project to contribute insights into this: the concept of a ‘repressive consensus’²¹ on security topics has been a phenomenon of compelling interest at the core of the study of security governance for decades now. De Londras’s contribution suggests that the politicisation view can accommodate such conditions, by analogising them to states of ‘de-politicisation’ which actors in security governance may seek to achieve in novel ways, such as arena-shifting. Scholars advocating the politicisation approach, however, ought to further probe the dynamics of these sorts of confined security politics, by using the kinds of political-studies tools they are bringing to analysing the contestation of security. If ‘de-politicisation’ operates as a stand-in for previous theoretical images about how this kind of lack of contestation is socially produced, the perspective risks reifying the kind of ontological divide that has stifled investigation into the politics of security – with ‘securitised’ issues on one side, and politicised issues touching security (not completely securitised, yet) on the other. This may confine ‘security as politics’ efforts to a niche that includes certain kinds of cases (however multiplying), rather than a perspective that can offer theoretical insight to security studies overall. Such an ambition, however, would depend on taking an even more

20 Bilgin, 2018, p. 96.

21 de Londras 2018, p. 116.

explicitly challenging position on the deficiencies of previous theoretical perspectives.

So, in the end, is the politicisation angle another oblique shot at the 'security as politics' target? It seems much more direct than many attempts that have come before, and of very evident value in opening a progressive research programme in the field. Perhaps efforts building from this special issue might take on more fully what the politicisation perspective has so far more ontologically implied. If we are going to view 'security as politics' redressing evident blind spots in initial theory construction, examining politicisation – that is, security politics only after certain kinds of visible, easily observable conflict have erupted – will take us a good way, but only so far, down the road.

Mike Slaven

University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK
msslaven@lincoln.ac.uk

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Sacralisation as a Limit to Contestation in an Illiberal Context

The existing body of work on the conceptual travel of securitisation demonstrates the varied use of security-speak, beyond the justification of emergency measures.²² Security-speak can be utilised for mobilisation, ritual, and control across various regime types, ranging from liberal democracies to autocracies. We believe that 'illiberal' hybrid regimes, such as those in Russia, Hungary or Turkey represent an in-between category that offers a fruitful subject for empirical research, but also for theory building. The ERIS special issue on 'the Politicisation of Security: Controversy, Mobilisation, Arena Shifting' is an excellent and thought-provoking collection of research, which inspired us to rethink 'security' and the way it alters, supplements, or limits politics, but we cannot do it justice in a mere 1500 words. Thus in our contribution we will primarily focus only on the concept of sacralisation discussed in Pinar Bilgin's piece. We find the concept to be an important addition to the toolkit used for analysing security politics. Below, we highlight two aspects of sacralisation which we believe supplement securitisation, thereby enlarging the repertoire of the sovereign to reinforce and preserve the legitimacy of its rule and its exceptional powers. First, sacralisation can be used as an alternative to securitisation, which is particularly relevant in illiberal settings where securitisation is the *modus operandi* of the regime. Second, sacralisation can become a means for exonerating the sovereign from its incapacity to provide security, which points to the concept's wider relevance across political systems.

Sacralisation as an alternative to securitisation

As the editors note in the introduction, securitisation is not exclusively about using power to discipline citizens. But it is arguably still an exceptionally efficient way to exert discipline and control. This particular aspect of security-speak is clearly noticeable within the illiberal context, where securitisation is the *modus operandi* of the regime. Securitisation and uncertainty play a pivotal role in maintaining regime legitimacy: through security-speak, the elite gradually expands the realm of the emergency, subsuming more and more aspects of normal politics under a security narrative. Illiberal regimes therefore

22 Vuori, 2008; Wilkinson, 2007.

amplify the exclusionary, Schmittian elements of securitisation:²³ they construct enemies from political competitors; remove problematic issues from the agenda where the government has difficulties in achieving its goals via normal politics; neutralise debate regarding issues that are considered politically harmful, such as corruption scandals or anti-democratic measures; and they construct threats to national security for patriotic political mobilisation. When external and internal threats are ever present and the language of security has become part of the everyday, only the government can serve as a provider of security, and a source of certainty. Thus, securitisation, fear and the use of extreme measures for control mutually reinforce each other and help the regime maintain its legitimacy.

The editors of this special issue are right in suggesting that “it is misleading to regard security as distinct from contentious politics and as purely controlled by elites”,²⁴ but we argue that it is still fair to say that securitising elites seek control over the security agenda. This is especially true for illiberal systems where one of the main challenges to the regime is a re-democratisation of security through politicisation. So what can the government do to reverse/limit/prevent contestation? First, the regime can simply expand securitisation to demonise its critics. Second, it can resort to non-discursive practices to silence contestation, for instance using targeted legal means.²⁵ But Bilgin in this special issue suggests a third option: rendering the whole debate moot through sacralisation.

Sacralisation, just like securitisation, is also inherently about power and legitimacy. However, it is not necessarily about seeking legitimacy for emergency measures (due to weak democratic control, measures can be readily introduced), but for the regime itself. While securitisation can be a deliberative, democratic process, sacralisation always appears non-democratic: it is by definition the denial of contestation. If government (security) policy can be conflated with sacralised cultural artefacts, these policies can be excluded from a politicised discussion whereas sacredness reinforces the government’s legitimacy. For these reasons, we believe that sacralisation could be conceptualised as a strong alternative to securitisation proper for seeking to limit contestation in illiberal contexts. We understand sacralisation as a concept that is not limited to the religious, but has broader relevance. For instance, an atheistic ideology like communism can be sacralised to limit contestation without resorting to any theological argument. Further theorisation of secular sacralisation is

23 Williams, 2003, 2015.

24 Haggmann, Hegemann, and Neal, 2019, p. 12.

25 Kopper et al., 2019.

not only a promising avenue of research, but it can also detach the concept from potential anti-religious or even anti-Islam overtones.

Put differently, one could argue that sacralisation is inherently illiberal by shifting the discourse to a terrain of the sacred and holy which is incompatible with liberal principles of discourse and deliberation. Yet, the concept of sacralisation offers insights for security studies not only by limiting the way one can talk about an issue (invoking taboos), but also highlighting that there are forces beyond human control against which no human agency can provide security. Thus while the sovereign may have exceptional powers, its capacities are still not limitless (i.e. even if its rule on earth should be beyond contestation, it cannot challenge divine will). This may be especially important for an illiberal context where the regime would be reluctant to admit any failure or weakness because of a fear of a loss of legitimacy.

Sacralisation as the exoneration of the sovereign

When an issue is securitised the actor doing the securitising claims exceptional powers and thereby frees itself from democratic accountability. By using the language of security, the sovereign seeks exceptional powers, while suggesting that without such an extraordinary centralisation of power it is not possible to fend off threats that the community faces. Yet, if the sovereign cannot deliver and the community still feels threatened, the sovereign's legitimacy can evaporate. For this reason, the construction of problems, threats, agents and solutions is crucial for a securitising actor seeking control. But if all else fails, as Bilkin highlights, sacralisation can offer a way for the sovereign to seek absolution from failing to provide satisfactory security for the community.

Bilgin discusses the case of the Turkish city of Kilis where residents were dissatisfied with the government's response (or rather, the lack thereof) following a series of rocket strikes launched from ISIS-controlled parts of Syria. Bilgin shows that, given the international and domestic context, the Turkish government initially wanted to limit its involvement. Counter-measures were only taken in August 2016, months after the events. By that time the government was ready to properly securitise the issue and to use the necessary military means. How could the government respond to dissatisfied residents before it took action? Talking about national security would have highlighted the threat, but it would have equally underlined the government's inability to protect the people of Kilis efficiently. Sacralisation offered the means to talk of the events: the Turkish government referred to shared cultural beliefs suggesting that rockets were falling under the 'watchful eyes of God'. On the one hand this meant that God was taking care of the city and had limited the number of victims. But more important, the government's rhetoric suggested that the fate of

the people of Kilis were exclusively in the hands of God. Everything that happened in Kilis was God's making, so there really was no place to blame the government for not doing enough.

Arguably an audience is more likely to accommodate the sacralisation of an issue and accept that events were divinely preordained in more religious societies. However, we believe that the concept has wider significance as the subject of sacralisation does not necessarily need to be religious. When for example a country faces the forces of nature – an earthquake, fires or tsunami – the sovereign can claim that there was no way to be prepared to provide protection against such devastating powers of nature. Whatever transpires therefore does not show an incapacity for leadership, but something that was beyond the control of the sovereign.

Politicisation and sacralisation both highlight the open-ended and dynamic nature of securitisation, and can facilitate the theory's application to new contexts like illiberal regimes, without much of a conceptual stretch. Sacralisation can be used to create political taboos around diverse issues within an illiberal context, for instance kin-citizenship in Orbán's Hungary,²⁶ or the annexation of Crimea in Putin's Russia.²⁷ These examples all suggest a wider applicability of the concept – we find the theoretical implications of non-religious sacralisation especially compelling. We believe this excellent special issue can serve as a starting point for both theoretical and empirical future work.

Ákos Kopper & András Szalai

ELTE University, Budapest, Hungary

kopper@tatk.elte.hu; andras.szalai@tatk.elte.hu

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²⁶ Pogonyi 2015.

²⁷ Teper 2016.

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Politicisation and the Legal

All the contributions of this special issue refer, to different degrees, to law or legal procedures. However, neither the role of the law nor any particular legal perspective is prominent in the individual articles, with the exception of Fiona de Londras' piece on 'Politicisation, Law and Rights in the Transnational Counter-Terrorism Space'. What follows will focus especially on this contribution in order to address the relationship of politicisation and legalisation, which is an important aspect of the politicisation of security. At the very beginning of her article, de Londras states that law and politics are difficult to separate. I am not sure, whether I would agree with this statement in general. Yet, in the case of security, political and legal dynamics do indeed seem to be highly intertwined.

This is not self-evident, however. The processes of 'politicisation' and 'legalisation' normally point in different, if not opposite, directions. Gunther Teubner opened a frequently quoted piece from 1984 with the observation that 'juridification' (*Verrechtlichung*) is not only an ugly word; it also describes an ugly thing.²⁸ What was meant was the regulation and bureaucratisation by law, extending into ever more sub-areas of society. A possible consequence of legalisation in this sense, according to Teubner, is that through legal formalisation political conflicts are transferred from their actual political context into a legal context and thus are politically neutralised – or even de-politicised.²⁹ In other words, the process of legal formalisation means the transformation of a social or political conflict into a more legal-technical form. As a consequence,

28 Teubner, 1984, p. 290.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 298.

conflicts will be regulated by means of the judicial language and the mechanism of the judicial procedure, which are different to the political rationality of a conflict. While this could be understood as a loss, it is important to emphasise that leaving a conflict to informal, non-legal, mechanisms can mean leaving it to the mercy of existing power relations, as Teubner also underlines.³⁰

The issue of informality will be discussed in a moment. At this point Teubner reminds us of a sense of politicisation which is different to the core perspectives of this special issue – which stress how politics increases controversy and mobilisation in the context of security. This other sense of politicisation addresses the process of moving an issue, which is legally regulated, into the political arena in order to renegotiate it politically. This does not imply, however, that this political arena is transparent to the public or that it includes mechanisms to participate. As de Londras' article shows, even the legal protocol of these decision- or law-making arenas might be compromised. And quite often acute security 'crises' are used for rationalising such compromises.

Taking this as a vantage point, reading de Londras' article against the background of, first, legalisation and, second, informalisation, is highly insightful. The interface of legalisation and politicisation is also central to what is discussed in the contexts of security law and security culture. Quite similar to Teubner, Christopher Gusy argues that in security law, risks are hived off into a specific bureaucratic legal culture. Spectacular individual cases, however, can lead to the consequence that the area of security is taken out of this sub-culture.³¹ In other words, the legalised issue of security becomes re-politicised in the face of a severe security threat – yet not politicised in the sense of allowing a broader public participation in the subsequent decision-making process. Public perception is rather used as a pressure to shift decision-making into elite political bodies.

Counter-terrorism is such a case, where legal and political rationalities blur and, as de Londras notes, where legal control of the political might get lost.³² This well illustrates the basic challenge of the concept of securitisation – or 'crisisification' more general: the complex interaction of a real threat with a perception of that threat. It is the perception first of all that triggers the political and legal consequences. This perception may – deliberately or unintentionally – be de-coupled from the real threat and lead to political and legal changes which, on closer inspection, appear completely disproportionate.

De Londras takes this problem to the transnational level, and thus addresses a highly relevant current case of that dynamic. She shows how the threat of

30 *Ibid.*, 297.

31 Gusy, 2010, p. 111.

32 de Londras, 2018, p. 116.

foreign terrorist fighters was framed as a transnational concern and condensed in legal sources such as UNSC Resolutions as well as at the European level. Furthermore, she illustrates in detail how the ordinary law-making process was circumvented due to the urgency of the terrorist threat leading to significant decisions in consequence.³³ However, due to the transnationalisation of that process we face a paradoxical situation: On the one hand, decision-making was politicised in the sense that as it was shifted into the transnational political arena it became de-legalised. On the other hand, this created legally binding directives which then had to be implemented on the domestic level, due to the legal, not political, rationale. In other words, a de-legalised law was a result of a political process, which was depoliticised in the sense that it lacks transparency or mobilisation. Instead, it rather forms a case of a classical securitisation paradigm.

The issue of informal international cooperation, through the G7 and G20 in particular, is addressed only in the introduction and conclusion of de Londras' article. However, especially given the theme of the legal implications of the politicisation of security these 'clubs' are of particular importance. The outputs of informal international organisations are not legally binding, and there is reason to assume that their instruments in fact are used by some actors to avoid law and legal bindingness. But I would agree with de Londras that some kind of 'norm-entrepreneurship' is part of informal international cooperation and that these groups form part of what is discussed in the context of informal international law-making debates. It is important however, not only to understand informal groups as filling the gap created by a lack of formality or supporting formal processes. Informality is a *modus* in international politics in its own right.³⁴ It would have been interesting to read in more detail how de Londras locates informality within the dynamics of legalisation and politicisation. While it entails, on the one hand, de-legalising some potential outcomes of cooperation, on the other club-diplomacy does nothing to politicise in the sense of furthering controversy, participation or mobilisation.³⁵ On the contrary, 'G-politics' is a means to emphasise and strengthen statist politics and power asymmetries, with legal accountability remaining rather unclear.

Stefan Kroll

Leibniz Peace Research Institute, Frankfurt

kroll@hsfk.de

33 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

34 Daase, 2009; Roger, 2020.

35 Hagmann et al., 2018.

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