

# De/Securitising the 2007 Schengen Enlargement: Austria and “the East”

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## Abstract

Drawing on the concepts of securitisation and desecuritisation, the article argues that the construction of security threats does not necessarily have to relate to their threat potential, but can be instrumentalised and utilised by competing actors for specific aims. Using the example of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and the Austrian tabloid press, the article scrutinises how West-European security-political and media actors reacted to the challenges of the 2007 Schengen enlargement. With reference to Balzacq’s “three faces of securitisation” it shows that the tabloids’ securitising strategy proved to be more successful than the ministry’s desecuritising strategy, because the newly emerged context did not support a congruence of the audience’s frame of reference and the ministry’s speech act.

## Keywords

Austria; Balzacq; Schengen; securitisation; Eastern Europe.

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OVERNIGHT ON THE 20 AND 21 DECEMBER 2007, LAND AND SEA BORDERS BETWEEN THE Schengen area and the eight Eastern European countries that acceded to the European Union in May 2004 were abolished. The border controls at international airports followed in March 2008. The full implementation of the Schengen *acquis* had fuelled hopes and fears on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Particularly in the “West”, however, fears of a suspected increase in cross-border crime from “the East” prevailed and superseded many of the advantages of borderless travel inside the enlarged Schengen area.

For the EU states that represented the pre-2007 Schengen eastern frontier, the abolition of controls at the borders with their eastern European neighbours is indeed not only a technical but also a highly emotional matter. The strongly rooted image of the “East” as untrustworthy, threatening and fundamentally different from an imagined “Western” community is sufficiently pervasive to mobilise objections. Simultaneously, the issue attracts actors and interest groups from various backgrounds who aim at instrumentalising it by establishing their own narrative as the dominant one.

This article examines the Austrian political and media discourse before and after the Schengen enlargement in 2007. Austria is a special case among the EU-15 in many respects, making the impact of the Schengen enlargement particularly visible. Austria is the “old” EU member with the most East-European neighbour states, namely four (Czech

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Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia).<sup>1</sup> No other incumbent member state shares borders with as many new EU members. This geopolitical position exerts an impact on fears of the “East”, with the “East” being a diffuse and threatening bogeyman, firmly rooted in collective memory, luring right beyond the border. It is exactly this image which serves as a frame of reference for actors who aim at instrumentalising anxieties.

As this article will show, since the end of the Cold War, and particularly during EU and Schengen enlargement, Austria’s post-socialist neighbour countries have increasingly been referred to in terms of security in the realm of home affairs (this is, however, not true for economic relations). Drawing on insights of security studies, predominantly the Copenhagen School and its critics, the discursive connection that is established between security and the “East” can be considered an act of securitisation; “the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects” (Wæver 2004: 9). Securitisation was put forward predominantly by right-wing political actors and the tabloid media, predominantly *Österreich* and *Kronen Zeitung*. It proved to be successful, since it did not refer to particular neighbours, but to the concept of the “East”, and as such to a firmly rooted cognitive pattern. Furthermore, it became hard to reverse when political actors sought to desecuritize the issue in order to legitimise the decision to enlarge the Schengen area to the East in 2007. Thus, the sudden and purposeful downplay of the “East” as a security risk did not find its expected repercussions in public and media discourse.<sup>2</sup>

The first section introduces and discusses the concepts of securitisation and desecuritisation, using Balzacq’s (2005) “three faces of securitisation”: (1) The context, (2) the audience and (3) political agency. As a contextual framework, Austria’s geopolitical and historical position is also introduced. The audience is the public of the referent country, which expresses its assent (for example, in the amount of read newspapers or of votes for particular parties). The Austrian ministry of the interior and the Austrian tabloid media are depicted as actors, who, in their own special ways, sought to win the audience’s assent.<sup>3</sup> The text concludes by arguing that the political actors – the ministry – found it hard to desecuritize the Eastern neighbours in the course of the Schengen enlargement. With the enlargement, the ministry’s context suddenly differed from the audience’s frame of reference; hence the new context did not support a congruence of the audience’s experiences and the actors’ speech act. Thus the actors discussed (tabloids and politicians) did not behave homogeneously, and the tabloids strategy suited the frame of reference of large parts of the audience.

### The Logics of Securitisation and Desecuritisation

The Copenhagen School (CS) developed a social constructivist concept of security that is nested between the poles of militarily defined security on the one hand and a wide notion

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Czech Republic and Slovenia geographically are not in the East of Austria, the geopolitical and mental label of “the East” applies to them as well.

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical and descriptive parts of the text are complemented by empirical research collected in 2008 during four months of field research in the Austrian ministry of the interior, the Federal Criminal Police Office and other police and security units in the Austrian *Bundesländer*. I conducted qualitative interviews and informal conversations with political actors and practitioners in the security field, all of whom were concerned with different aspects of the 2007 Schengen enlargement. All interviews have been anonymised. In analysing the impact of the Schengen enlargement through the eyes of Austrian bureaucrats, I follow Burawoy’s “Extended Case Method”, which “adopts a situational analysis but avoids the pitfalls of relativism and universalism by seeing the situation as shaped from above rather than constructed from below” (Burawoy, 1991: 276).

<sup>3</sup> This article focuses on the discourse emerging within Austria. How the new members themselves evaluate the current situation and their relationship towards the old members can only be subject to speculation and must be the aim of future research.

of security as everything people can worry about on the other hand. Three ideas are central to the CS: securitisation, sectors and regional security complexes. *Sectors* refer to the distinction between political, economic, environmental, military and societal security. The idea of *security complexes* “suggests an analytical scheme for structuring analysis of how security concerns tie together in a regional formation” (Wæver 2004: 9). This paper focuses on *securitisation*.

For the CS, “security is a practice, a specific way of framing an issue. Security discourse is characterized by dramatizing an issue as having absolute priority. Something is presented as an existential threat: if we do not tackle this, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here, or not be free to deal with future challenges in our way)” (Wæver 1996: 106). By declaring something a security issue, the speaker entitles himself to enforce and legitimise unusual and extreme measures to fight this threat and thus achieve a higher aim: “The necessity of an existential quality (‘survival’) follows from the function of security discourse as *lifting* issues to urgency and necessity above normal politics” (Wæver 1996: 107 [emphasis in original]).

If the audience that the actor addresses accepts and supports this *securitising move*, the securitisation can be considered successful, and thus the securitising actor acquires social power, resources, and legitimacy. To declare something a security issue in the view of the CS does not entail any information about its actual threat potential; such a labelling should rather be understood as a self-referential practice.

The concept of securitisation and the widening of the classical notion of security have provoked a lively debate, and faced criticism from a number of authors (see *Cooperation and Conflict* 1999, volume 34: issue 3). For the purpose of this article, Balzacq’s (2005) critiques are of particular importance. He argues that security as a speech act “overlooks the external context, the psycho-cultural orientations of the audience, and neglects the differential power between the speaker and the listener” (Balzacq 2005: 174). Instead he suggests analysing securitisation as a strategic practice, focusing on three factors: political agency, audience and context; the efficacy of securitisation is contingent upon the congruence of these three factors. Securitisation, he argues, is not a self-contained and self-referential process, as proclaimed by the CS. Every securitisation is, in his view, “a historical process that occurs between an antecedent influential set of events and their impact on interactions” (Balzacq 2005: 193), and as such its analysis cannot be restricted to a single factor, like the rules of the speech act.

### *Desecuritisation*

Although the authors of the Copenhagen School dedicate much time and space to the discussion of securitisation, they prefer to opt for the contrary, since “security should be seen as negative, as a failure to deal with issues as normal politics” (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 29). Desecuritisation, as they label it, entails “the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining process of the political sphere” (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 4). Another option would be to “try to keep issues de-securitized” (Wæver 2000: 253); in other words, not to securitise them in the first place, hence there would be no need to desecuritize. Roe (2004: 285) argues that this suggestion should rather be described as “non-securitization, where there is simply no security to begin with”. A third option to desecuritize is, in the view of Wæver (2000: 253), “to keep the responses in forms that do not generate security dilemmas and other vicious spirals”. Securitised issues can, according to Roe (2004: 285), be managed or be transformed. To manage them is however not the same as to desecuritize them, since they are not moved back to normal politics, but are still framed in terms of security.

It can be questioned to what extent the strict differentiation into “schools” is useful (see c.a.s.e. collective 2006), since the different approaches not only share distinctive features (Wæver 2004: 13), but can be vividly combined and thus need not be treated entirely separately. Accordingly, from the CS I borrow the concept of securitisation and the idea that it can refer to different sectors in a given society, in this case predominantly the societal sector. Furthermore, I use the speech act approach for the purpose of this article, but I also share Bigo’s (2002) opinion that securitisation manifests itself in institutionalised practices and the *habitus*’ of the actors in the security field. However, since the effects of this specific social field are not in the centre of this article, this issue will not be elaborated further, but should nevertheless be kept in mind as an underlying presumption.

### **Context: Austria and the Schengen enlargement**

“Security” does not mean the same for every audience, but can differ among social groups or also among nation states. According to Balzacq (2005: 184) “[t]he configuration of securitization evolves within a symbolic context of forces that define what a conceptual event (security) is for an audience, and when the use of that concept resonates with the context in order to increase or win the support for the enunciator’s policy”. This article divides the context into three elements: (1) the Schengen enlargement, i.e. a political decision taken top-down and exerting an impact on all members of the Schengen area, (2) the concept of the “East”, i.e. a mental category rooted in collective memory, and (3) the country case study of Austria. The key question here is: to what extent did the Austrian context prepare the grounds for a successful securitisation and/or desecuritisation of the Schengen 2007 enlargement? Effective securitisation becomes more likely the more the audience accepts the speaker’s depiction of an alleged threat. While the Copenhagen School in this point relies on the power of the utterance of security itself, Balzacq (2005: 181) opposes this view arguing that “language does not construct reality; at best, it shapes our perception of it”. What is missing in this equation is the question, to what extent the external context affects the efficacy of securitisation. To be successful the actor’s securitising move has to relate to the audience’s perceptive reality, it has to trigger fears and anxieties, in short: it has to appeal to the actual situation and developments as well as the audience’s collective memory in order to win its assent. Both textual and cultural meaning that are specific for a given community “form a frame of reference through which security utterances can be understood” (Balzacq 2005: 183).

#### *Enlarging Schengen to the “East”*

“Schengen” has been the most successful example of European politics in the realm of Justice and Home Affairs to date, and it has become a core element of European integration and the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Schengen divided the European borders into two categories – internal and external. At the internal borders, stationary border controls were abolished in favour of mobile controls, increased cross-border cooperation and surveillance, while the rather “traditional” border controls were moved to the external borders of the EU.

The prospect of eliminating border controls, however, can easily raise feelings of insecurity in a given public, for “the politics of border controls are located precisely at the point of intersection between issues of security and identity” (Walker 1998: 170). Visible border controls are still perceived as highly efficient by the public, even though many practitioners doubt their effectiveness when it comes to anything more than petty crime and instead favour investigative and surveillance policing measures.

The enlargement of the Schengen area in 2007 was a direct consequence of the EU enlargement in 2004, and as such it proved to be a highly emotional matter for all the parties involved. The accession of the East-European countries to the EU in 2004 had been presented in the EU-15 as means of self-protection (Higashino 2004). Following this argument, only successful integration could grant the continent's stability and prevent ethno-nationalist conflicts, such as those in the Balkans. The accession of parts of the former "enemy camp" to the EU, however, proved to be a great political and ideological challenge for the Union (Walker 2002: 26), and it raised severe concerns about the candidate countries' capabilities in crime-fighting matters. Thus, the debate oscillated between the two poles of "security" and "certain doom", with "the incorporation of former Warsaw Pact states being seen as *both* vital to European security *and* as a potential threat to it" (Loader 2002: 135 [emphasis in original]).

During the preparations for EU accession, the new member states, particularly those from Eastern Europe, found themselves in the role of "junior partners" who needed to prove their capabilities at being "good" Europeans (see Schwell 2008). With EU accession, these countries were, in effect, granted mere second-class membership, reduced to a buffer zone or *Cordon Sanitaire* between Schengen and the non-EU members (Gromadzki 2001: 48f.). Though the new East-European members who had acceded to the EU in 2004 already had accepted the Schengen *acquis* with EU accession, they did not fully implement it until the end of 2007. The process of preparing for the Schengen enlargement, however, did not only take place inside the candidate countries, and it was far from being a purely technical matter. Widespread mistrust, both in the political and the public sphere, engendered fears that the security of the community would be endangered by enlarging to the East.

### *The "East"*

The EU enlargements to the South had similarly fuelled fears that turned out unjustified (see Hix 2005: 350). But the enlargement to the East, at least in mental categories, cannot be compared to those to the South. The North-South divide often is translated into differences of economic behaviour, but still the "laggards" engage the North's sympathy (Eder 2006: 263). The East, however, is an "Other" that is not regarded with that much favour: "This East appears as Russia, providing a referent for something that Europe is different from" (Eder 2006: 264). But the "East" did not exclusively refer to Russia. As Wolff (1994) shows, already in the 18th century Western Europeans constructed the image of an underdeveloped "Eastern Europe", in order to show themselves in a positive light.

The West's cultural concept of the "East" is a narrative of backwardness, insecurity, ambiguity and anxiety, strongly resembling the concept of Orientalism put forward by Said (1979). Furthermore, both Orientalism and the "East" are meant to construct alterity and "the other", which not only divides the social world into "us" and "them", but lets "us" (Westerners, EU citizens, etc.) stand out as better, morally superior, and progressive (see Wolff 1994; Buchowski 2006).

All collective identities are constructed in relation, and identity necessarily entails a boundary mark, creating through the mechanisms of categorisation and self-categorisation a differentiation between "us" and "them". There is, however, an important difference between a mere comparison and the depiction of "them" as a threat. In the latter case, difference becomes something negative; identity becomes pathologic (Delanty 1999: 268). Eastern Europe has long served as Western Europe's "other", and consequently the accompanying feelings of fear and mistrust are not quickly overcome. The mental boundary has not shifted eastwards at the same rate as the EU's and Schengen external border.

*Austria: From the periphery to the centre*

Austria is a special case among the “old” EU-15 for several reasons. The country joined the EU only in 1995. Prior to the transition to democracy in Eastern Europe, Austria had a neutral status between NATO and Warsaw Pact (Kořan 2006). However, the country ideologically considered itself both as part of Western Europe and as ‘bridge’ between East and West. Due to the changing security situation after the end of the Cold War and the mitigating conflict between East and West, neutral “bridge-builders” were less and less needed. As Ferreira-Pereira (2006: 111) points out, though, Austrian political elites have found it hard to abandon the “mental habit” of neutrality, not at least in order to satisfy the electorate: “Neutrality had become a question of identity and tradition for a population inclined to regard it as the originating source of the blessings the country had enjoyed since the end of the Second World War”.

Austria was also particularly affected by the system change in Eastern Europe. Four of its eight neighbouring countries are post-socialist states: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia. Moreover, all of them were part of the Habsburg Empire. Due to this common heritage, Austrian politicians still feel responsible for these countries; this is an attitude that can quickly turn into paternalism. The geopolitical position also shaped Austria’s security identity and perception. Immediately following the system change in Eastern Europe, there were fears that Austria could be directly affected by eventual political and/or ethno-national distortions in the neighbourhood. This concern particularly related to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and prompted Austria to take charge of communication with Slovenia and Croatia and to become their advocate in the West. This interest, however, slowed down by the end of the 1990s to such a degree that leading representatives of Eastern European countries began to criticise Austria for not fulfilling its role as Eastern Europe’s advocate and for lacking a well thought-out political strategy (Kramer 2006: 831). In recent years, however, Austria has repeatedly confirmed its support for an EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans (Pollak & Puntischer Riekmann 2007: 11f).

These factors form the frame of reference through which the audience interprets the security utterances of the actors made in the course of the EU accession of Austria’s post-socialist neighbours in 2004 and the enlargement of the Schengen area in 2007.

**Audience: a population under siege**

Obviously, the success of securitisation is highly contingent upon the question, if the audience complies with and subscribes to the securitising actor’s view. The actor’s foremost aim, thus, is to win the target audience’s support, both moral and formal, if possible. A successful securitisation relies also on the level of identification between a securitising actor and his target audience’s experiences and life world. Balzacq (2005: 192) identifies the following components of the audience as a factor for securitisation: “(i) the audience’s frame of reference; (ii) its readiness to be convinced, which depends on whether it perceives the securitizing actor as knowing the issue and as trustworthy; and (iii) its ability to grant or deny a formal mandate to public officials”. The audience in this article is characterised by two factors: its self-perception as being a country under siege, and the mental category of *Austrochauvinism*.

*The country “on the edge of a thunderstorm area”*

The common history in the Austro-Hungarian Empire does not automatically entail a deep bond between Austria and its former compatriots. On the one hand Austrian politicians are anxious to fulfil the role as mediator and advocate of East- and Southeast-European

interests, while emphasising spatial but also explicitly historical proximity. Thus the relationship appears to be 'natural'. This, however, applies only to 'official' relations. It is apparently not reflected in any way in public, primarily media reception; this position to a large degree ignores historical proximities, but draws on issues of alterity and on micro-security.

The dominant discourse here is one of a country under siege. Security fears along borders that are marked by a decline in wealth are not unusual. Economically underdeveloped regions are particularly prone to insecurities resulting from change and moral panic, and the media is often all too eager to fuel the latter. Moral panic is defined by Hall *et al.* (1978: 16) as follows:

When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is *out of all proportion* to the actual threat offered, when 'experts', in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors *perceive* the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk 'with one voice' of rates, diagnoses, prognoses and solutions, when the media representations universally stress 'sudden and dramatic' increases (in numbers involved or events) and 'novelty', above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a *moral panic*. [emphasis in original]

Ministry officials in the interviews often explained the allegedly widespread fears and anxieties among the population of the borderlands by arguing that the Austrian regions bordering on the post-socialist neighbouring countries until the demise of the Iron Curtain were, or rather: are imagined as, quasi 'crime-free areas'. The collective memory of large parts of the borderland population remembers and idealises pre-1989 as a time when nobody had to lock his door or car, for who should steal a car or break into a house in one of Austria's most remote and poor corners? One might presume that 20 years later a certain habituation effect might have occurred. As the interviewees state, inhabitants of border areas are voters as well, and hence their subjective feeling of safety is of high value for both local and national politicians.

But it is not only the inhabitants of the border area that feel threatened by the overwhelming amount of "East" behind their borders. Austria's position "on the edge of a thunderstorm area", as the former Austrian foreign minister Alois Mock put it (cited in Höll 2001: 462), was particularly suited to stoke fears in the Austrian population of an influx of organized crime, movement of labour as well as competition from low-paid workers and cheap products (see Wodak and Matouschek 1993).

### *Austrochauvinism*

The electoral success of the right-wing populist *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in 1999 and its subsequent participation in the government met these concerns and led to protests all over Europe (see Happold 2000). Nevertheless the rise of the two right-wing populist parties FPÖ and BZÖ (*Bündnis Zukunft Österreich*) continues. In the national elections in 2008 the FPÖ gained 17.5 per cent (11.0 per cent in 2006), and the BZÖ 10.7 per cent (4.1 per cent), hence nearly one third of the Austrian eligible voters cast their ballot for right-wing populist parties. This is an increase of 13.1 per cent in only two years.

Their populist xenophobic and anti-Semitic programmes do thus not appear in any way questionable to large parts of society, on the contrary. Hence it seems to be more than a mere coincidence that Amnesty International (2009) only recently denounced the institutionalised racism among Austrian police officers. The late Jörg Haider already in his lifetime has been described as a master in the field of populism, as "a man of the people"

(see Gingrich 2006). The “Princess Diana”-like scenes which took place in his home *Bundesland* of Carinthia after he died in a car accident in 2008, both gave evidence of his overwhelming popularity and scared dissenting national and international observers.

This particular part of Austrian mind-set and self-perception has been aptly described as *Austrochauvinism*, which refers to an – allegedly specifically Austrian – cognitive pattern that is characterised by egocentricity and a strong feeling of superiority towards its neighbouring countries and its migrant population, but results from a trauma of the Austrian self-confidence. Mantl (1998: 55) dates the emergence of *Austrochauvinism* to the middle of the 1980s. He also observes the concurrent development of another mental habitus, the other side of the coin: “Austromasochism”, which he locates predominantly with Austrian intellectuals, despairing of their country and simultaneously succumbed to self-doubt.

Large parts of the audience are thus inclined to grant both moral and formal support to the securitising actors via votes. Concomitantly the cognitive pattern of *Austrochauvinism* frames the way they interpret the social world around them and thus prepares the ground for a successful securitisation by those who will be in the focus in the next section: the actors.

### **Agency: Instrumentalising (in)security**

Agency is “the practical force of discourse” (Balzacq 2005: 186), since the perlocutionary effect of a discursive action is essential for a successful securitisation. Discourse and action are thus inextricably linked. The power of words’ agency depends on “(i) the context and the power position of the agent that utters them; (ii) the relative validity of statements for which the acquiescence of the audience is requested; and (iii) the manner in which the securitizing actor makes the case for an issue, that is, the discursive strategy displayed” (Balzacq 2005: 190).

Since the actors under scrutiny in this article are public officials and the tabloid papers, it is worth mentioning that Balzacq (2005: 190) attributes a particular favourable position for securitisation to the former, because they “hold influential positions in the security field based on their political capital, and have privileged access to mass media”. The audience’s insufficient access to information and its conviction that public officials must have “good”, i.e. objectively serious reasons to move an issue onto the security agenda, can indeed facilitate the work of the securitising actor. It should be added, however, that this may be the case only as long as their strategy and the strategy of the tabloids do not contradict each other. Certainly a ministry’s strategy would not be doomed to failure quasi-automatically, but without homogeneity, the ministry’s “pole position” is seriously endangered by the tabloid strategy.

### *Securitising the “East”*

As Stabile (2001) shows in the examples of the Iran-Contra affair, the “War on Terror” and the criminalisation of the black civil rights movement, the political leadership often not only tries to direct media coverage, but the interests of both media and politics frequently go hand in hand and mutually strengthen each other. There are, however, other cases where the political leadership for some reason is explicitly not interested in the (continuing) securitisation of an issue. In such cases, desecuritisation rather than securitisation is preferred. This is exactly what can be observed in the case of the Schengen enlargement.



Before the enlargement the tabloids and the ministry of the interior were in line in their depiction of the security threats from the “East”. The fight against cross-border crime, organised crime and terrorism was heatedly fought, with the goal being to enforce increased competences, tightened laws and better equipment on the basis of the functional spill-over. Following this argument, a new threat or an increase in crime rates calls for enhanced or new measures in order to handle them effectively; this, in turn, can evoke measures in other policy fields. The state in this theoretical model appears as merely reactive (see Walker 1998: 171).

The ministry’s and the tabloid strategy complemented one another in the eyes of the audience, and the argument was presented as follows: The post-socialist neighbours and their abilities in crime-fighting matters cannot be trusted, since they are countries of origin and transit for (organised) crime and illegal migration. The demise of the Iron Curtain, the breakup of Yugoslavia and finally the relaxation of border controls led to a hitherto unprecedented influx of migrants, asylum-seekers and crime, all of which threaten both Austrian state and nation. Austria is “besieged”, it is depicted as “flooded” by migrants, particularly by those with Islamic background, who “make the Austrians feel foreign in their own country” and furthermore are put under general suspicion of terrorism. Asylum-seekers, predominantly those from African countries, are generally suspected of drug-trafficking, and of exploiting the Austrian welfare state. The image of the criminal can be attributed to migrants and asylum-seekers as well, but with the demise of the Iron Curtain a new type of criminal emerged: the tabloids invented the “Eastern criminal” (*Ostkriminelle*),<sup>4</sup> who would quickly cross the border from any post-socialist neighbouring country, break into houses and steal cars, and then, again, disappear quietly behind the border.

The tabloids demanded deportations of suspects of foreign origin, closed borders and an Austrian withdrawal from the European Union, which was deemed responsible for every misfortune, and warned of a complete loss of Austria’s neutrality.<sup>5</sup> Austria’s then Minister of the Interior, Günther Platter (ÖVP), though certainly not he alone in his actions, liked to present himself as standing in the first line of defence against these intruders. Since, as the idea of securitisation suggests, extraordinary threats need to be countered using extraordinary means, the Austrian ministers of the Interior implemented a number of actions. I will not go into detail here, but just to name a few measures: strategic multi- and bilateral cooperation in security and police matters, like participation in the treaty of Prüm, the invention of the “Forum Salzburg” (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2001), technical and training support for the new member states, and the disputed support deployment of the Austrian army.<sup>6</sup> However, with the abolition of border controls, the political leadership quickly changed its strategy, shifting toward a purposeful desecuritisation of the issue.

#### *The ministry’s strategy: desecuritising the neighbour*

With the decision to enlarge the Schengen area in December 2007, the frame of reference for the ministry changed. Although the enlargement was a top-down decision that the ministry could hardly influence unilaterally, it had to publicly support it. The decision to enlarge, however, entailed an argumentative problem: the old strategy of presenting the

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<sup>4</sup> This notion is part of virtually every issue of the *Kronen Zeitung*; for a sketchy overview s. Rusch 2007.

<sup>5</sup> The reference to neutrality and the simultaneous opposition against the EU, again, is a recurring motif in both *Österreich* and *Kronen Zeitung*.

<sup>6</sup> The deployment on the borders with Hungary and Slovakia was introduced in 1990 to compensate for the putative security deficit that accompanied the system change in Eastern Europe. Initially it was planned to last no longer than ten weeks, but it is still in place, since the local population’s subjective feeling of safety allegedly longs for a prolongation of the deployment over and over again.

neighbours as a security threat could not be used anymore, because it would have been hardly credible to securitise those countries with which Austria was just about to abolish border controls. Thus, the changed context forced the ministry to alter its strategy in order to keep the audience's trust.

The argument that was made right before and after the Schengen enlargement so as to sell it to the public can be summarised as follows: The East-European member states were countries of origin and transit for cross-border crime in the past, and could indeed not be trusted, but thanks to Austria's strict controls and support they have improved, and since Austria's leadership can trust them now and enjoy the advantages that the enlargement entails, so can the Austrian public.

According to an internal strategy document (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2007a), the ministry's communication strategy stressed the following points:

- 1) to depict the abolition of the border controls as positive and emphasise the resulting advantages,
- 2) to avoid (or rather to correct) information deficits,
- 3) to inform the public about chances, risks and advantages of the abolition of the borders,
- 4) to inform the public about developments on EU level concerning security issues, and
- 5) to find a binding terminology for external communication.

The means employed to implement the strategy of fighting crime thus consisted of a predominantly discursive performance of efficiency, i.e. police measures that had been taken nationally and internationally were enumerated, an information brochure was disseminated (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2007b), and, finally, a public-oriented personal inspection was undertaken by the minister of the interior, who promised that without his close examination no state would be able to join the Schengen area. According to reports by interview partners, however, by this point the fact and the date of the Schengen enlargement had already been irreversibly decided at the EU level.<sup>7</sup> This event underlines how important the performance of controlling the "East" was for the ministry.

The task of desecuritising the "East" proved to be even more complicated since the EU requirements ran counter to the Austrian strategy. As interview partners report, the ministry was not enthusiastic about the overnight removal of the borders and had communicated this several times to the Austrian public. Austria had favoured a gradual abolition of border controls, as had been the case with the internal borders with Germany and Italy: first the small crossing points were abandoned, then the medium ones and finally the large ones. The foremost reason why the Austrian demands were not fulfilled relates to the new members' status as "junior partners". Having held out for years in the backyard of the European periphery, they were not willing to accept patiently any successive enlargement. On the Austrian side, however, it would be difficult to sell the sudden disappearance of controls to both the public and the tabloids, considering the relevance of the symbolic dimension of border policing.

Border controls can play the role of a link between political agency and the audience. The political instrumentalisation of the European Football Championship EURO 2008 in Austria provides a telling example. Border controls at the Schengen internal were temporarily reinstated in order to prevent the entry of violent football hooligans. The reinstatement,

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with ministry officials, Vienna, 26 March 2008.

however, was also ostensibly linked to the promise that Austria could resume its border controls as a measure of self-defence whenever it wished to do so. Thus, the argument went, if Austria's politicians discovered a security threat, or if the security threat from the East would prove to become uncontrollable, it would always be possible to reinstate border controls for as long as it would take to fight the threat. They did not tell the public that Austria's freedoms do not go as far as they pretended. Article 2(2) of the Schengen Implementation Agreement provides that a reinstatement of border controls "is allowed if public policy or national security so require, and for a limited period only. The checks at the internal borders should be 'appropriate' and the other Schengen states have to be consulted beforehand" (Groenendijk 2004: 154).

The temporary reinstatement of border controls without a specific aim is generally not suitable for fighting threats like organised crime and, in fact, tends to affect Union citizens and to delay their travelling (Atger 2008: 6), yet their symbolic importance should not be underestimated. For the ordinary citizen border controls are a nuisance and delay traffic, but they prove that something is done, that the state is active in preventing the intrusion of anything unwanted. Thus many, though not all, forms of visible control serve no other purpose than to strengthen the legitimacy, credibility and position in the social field of the political actors who are responsible in the eyes of the audience, i.e. the public.

The ministry had legitimised extraordinary measures with reference to an alleged extraordinary threat, and thus the audience and the ministry had been in accord. With the neighbours acceding to the Schengen area in 2007, the ministry's context and frame of reference changed. The public would identify the decision to enlarge with its political representatives. In the new reality, the neighbours could not anymore be depicted as laggards and paradise for criminals. In order to keep its legitimacy and credibility, the ministry had to divert its course. Large parts of the audience, however, did not follow.

The "East" is not less dangerous than before, but now it is better controlled. This summarises the ministry's new desecuritising strategy. Desecuritisisation here means not only, in the words of the CS, to shift issues back to normal politics. Extraordinary measures are still in place: compensation measures, the army's support deployment along the borders with Slovakia and Hungary, etc. The aim of the ministry's desecuritising strategy, thus, is not to remove the extraordinary measures, but to distract the audience's attention and move it towards more prestigious issues. The security threats have thus not been transformed, but managed; they are still framed in terms of security (see Roe 2004: 285). This plan might have worked, if there had not been the tabloids.

### *The tabloid strategy*

The strategy of the tabloid media *Österreich* and *Kronen Zeitung* immediately before and after the Schengen enlargement starkly contradicted that of the ministry. Certainly both tabloids aim at selling their papers and to shape public opinion. The *Kronen Zeitung*, however, constructs and follows a strategy that significantly moves beyond the mere interest of selling newspaper copies, but pursues a political agenda of its own that does not at all focus on reporting political events, but on influencing and making them (see Rusch 2007: 55-59). Some interview partners who were able to observe the media coverage from a distance were rather "amused" both by the misrepresentation of the Schengen enlargement in the media and by the ministry's helpless, and largely unnoticed, attempts to counter this depiction by the means mentioned above.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Interviews with ministry officials, Vienna, 18, 20 and 26 March 2008.

It has already been argued that the securitisation of the Eastern neighbours stroke a chord in large parts of the Austrian population. In order to evaluate the tabloids' power position and the audience's readiness to accept their way of framing issues, I suggest using the media scope of the two large tabloid papers as an indicator. The daily *Österreich* reaches 10.0 per cent of the population, while the daily *Kronen Zeitung* is read by record-breaking 41.9 per cent (Media-Analyse 2009). Together the tabloids reach approximately half of the Austrian population; this is an extraordinary rate compared to newspapers in all other European countries.

The tabloids appealed to strongly rooted fears of crime from the "East" and warned that the opening of the borders would be almost irresponsible. Hence the headline on 21 December 2007 in the daily tabloid *Österreich* read: "We are borderless!" This joyful exclamation, however, was relativised by the subtitle: "The good thing: We have 80 million new neighbours. The bad thing: 22 per cent more home burglaries and 57 per cent more trucks" (*Österreich* 21 December 2007). The same newspaper shortly after warned of 6000 audacious Chechnyans who were suspected of driving from Poland directly "by taxi to the camp" (*Österreich* 3 January 2008); in other words, they were fleeing to the Austrian reception camps for asylum-seekers, which presumably were much more comfortable than the Polish ones, and were planning to live at the expense of poor Austrian citizens.

Hans Dichand, the publisher of Austria's largest tabloid *Kronen Zeitung*, wrote in his blog on 3 December 2007: "Sure, these submissive EU trucklers can even get excited about crime tourists, who will be 'presented' to us before the holidays. Then thieves won't be controlled anywhere" (Dichand 2007b). On 25 December he adds, that now, four days after the removal of border controls, in the region bordering on the Czech Republic cars are stolen "like cherries", but, he complains, official Austria behaves "as if everywhere was jubilation. Rarely ever before an increase in crime has been greeted in a country so stupidly..." (Dichand 2007a).

The tabloid strategy to appeal to an austrochauvinist audience that feels forced onto the defensive proved to be particularly successful, because it used the appropriate catchwords and key concepts: The tabloids divide the social world into "us", the community of good, honourable and hard-working Austrians, and "them", the diffuse bogeymen who are luring behind the border, waiting to come over and sell drugs to our children/rape our women/steal our cars/live at our expense. The Schengen enlargement did not force the tabloids to divert their strategy – on the contrary. With all border controls removed, the security threat was even more tangible; the appeal to the cognitive pattern of anxiety of the "East" appeared to be even more credible than before.

#### *100 days later: strategy revisited*

One hundred days after the abolishment of the Schengen internal border controls with the new members, Austrian crime statistics look positive. In fact, a remarkable decline of 9.3 per cent in the period from January to March 2008 is observable. For political and police representatives, these figures are objective proof of the efficiency of compensation measures. Their argument is that numbers don't lie nor are they subject to interpretation, as the Austrian minister of the interior claimed: "We are working on the basis of real facts and results, not of estimations, predictions or scaremongering" (Bundesministerium für Inneres 2008: 1). However, it must be mentioned that crime statistics tell little or nothing about the factual number and distribution of criminal offences in a given society. They rather distract attention from crime and focus it on police successes: "Questions about the actual amount of crime and the degree of control exercised are thus bypassed in favour of an index that offers great potential for organizational or bureaucratic control" (Manning 2005: 202).

For the Austrian Ministry of the Interior this means: the political and police strategy have worked out; compensation measures are successful, and thus legitimacy is based in efficiency. Some informants report, however, that the picture is much more differentiated than the sheer numbers suggest.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the overall amount of crime in Austria has decreased, and this is also valid for the *Bundesländer* that border on the new member states. However, some informants report that according to an internal evaluation of crime development by the Austrian Federal Criminal Police Office, a relocation of crime has taken place from the inland to the border. The main emphasis here is on home burglaries; in comparison to the previous year, districts directly bordering on the former Schengen external border showed a sharp increase since the abolition of border controls until the end of March 2008. Although it was not possible to identify significant tendencies and to establish a direct connection due to the short period since 21 December 2007, the possibility to fall victim to property offence since the abolition of the border controls seems to have risen the closer one lives to the border.

Accordingly, the tabloids still report home burglaries and car thefts in the border region and in Vienna, and they continue to stoke fears of the Eastern neighbours. But also the ministry, now with Maria Fekter (ÖVP) under new leadership, pursues its strategy of desecuritising the Eastern neighbours; this, however, is not to argue that the ministry now follows an entirely new path. Rather, the focus is now directed increasingly towards those who do not yet make a change of plans necessary: the non-EU members.

## Conclusion

The East-European member states have served as Western Europe's "other" for a considerable length of time, making this perception hard to change. This explains why the securitisation of the Schengen enlargement in Austria proved to be much more successful than its desecuritisation. The idea of the "East" as the "other" or even the "dark" side of the West has been inscribed into the collective identity of the "West". As Eder (2006: 265) puts it: "In this sense, the East reflects the ambiguity of the West regarding Europe". Hence, the securitisation of the "East" as a security threat is not only much easier to instrumentalise and utilise for political or other purposes, but it is also more convincing than its desecuritising counterpart.

The desecuritising strategy was a logical decision for the ministry resulting from the changing circumstances, according to the motto: "The 'East' is not less dangerous than before, but now it is better controlled". The tabloids countered with what may be summarised under the slogan: "The 'East' is as dangerous as before, but now it is not even controlled". Thus the ministry's and the tabloids' strategies, that before the enlargement had acted in concert, were no longer in accord. Furthermore, now the latter appealed much more to the audience's frame of reference than the former, since the new context did not support a congruence of the audience's experiences and the political actors' speech act. Accordingly, the political actors probably did not appear very credible to the public as they suddenly embraced those who they had shunned for years.

To what extent the geopolitical diminution of the East-West-asymmetry is reflected in a changing perception of the East-European member states as "post-socialist laggards", on the one hand, and as security threats for the old Schengen members, on the other hand, is contingent upon several factors. In the domain of public opinion and media coverage, certainly much depends on the question to what extent strategies and performances of security do not happen apart from the world of the inhabitants of the border regions. In the long run, the expected economic growth in the border regions should also entail an

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<sup>9</sup> Personal conversation with Federal Criminal Police officials, Vienna, 14 May 2008.

abolition of mental borders, which is not necessarily likely to produce but maybe to advance the development of integrated border regions.

The asymmetry of East and West in the long run will only be transcended if the "East" as a mental category is resolved and interaction can take place on an eye-to-eye level. However, one can assume that the development of a common European identity can only happen via excluding those who now, after the Schengen enlargement, find themselves on the other, even more "Eastern", side of the fence. Desecuritisation, it seems, can indeed be successful – at the expense of newly securitised "others".

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