

# How Czech Politicians and Parties Securitise Refugees: Comparing the MENA and Ukrainian Crises

ZDENĚK ROD AND MIROSLAV PLUNDRICH



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**Abstract:** *This comparative analysis scrutinises the distinctive features of the 2015 MENA and 2022 Ukrainian refugee crises in the Czech Republic, revealing notable differences in threat perceptions and stakeholder engagement while answering who was finally portrayed as the victim and by whom. Hence, the MENA crisis prompted EU-level action and migration system reform, and the Czech government was the leading securitisation actor; meanwhile, the Ukrainian crisis differs. Cultural and religious dimensions influenced negative perceptions of Muslim migrants, contrasting with the positive reception of Ukrainian refugees rooted in cultural affinities with the West rejection of Russian aggression. Despite that, during the Ukrainian case, the shift in threat perceptions from sovereignty to socio-economic concerns marked the latter. Our study shows that this was not done by the Czech government but by the opposition party groups. With a potential new MENA crisis on the horizon, both opposition and government persist in securitising migration. The 2025 parliamentary election is expected to spotlight migration, necessitating further exploration of evolving securitisation in Czechia.*

**Keywords:** *securitisation, Czechia, refugee crises, MENA, Ukraine*

## Introduction

Czechia, a relatively small state, has experienced two unprecedented refugee crises, starting with the so-called MENA (Middle East and North Africa) crisis<sup>1</sup>

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1 The EU, including Czechia, was mainly facing a massive influx of refugees fleeing from the Middle East as a consequence of the Syrian Civil War and general instability in the region (author's note).

in 2015 and ending with the refugee crisis caused by the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022<sup>2</sup> – both refugee crises shaped Czech society and political representation. In 2015, MENA refugees were refused entry to Czechia, partially politicised and considerably securitised by the Czech government. MENA migrants were generally displayed as a security threat to Czech society and EU relocation quotas as a threat to Czech sovereignty. The Czech government did not have the familiar feeling of accepting the MENA refugees as other EU states do (i.e. Germany and France). Together, in summary, the Czech government portrayed the Czech citizens, nationality and sovereignty as victims in the context of incoming MENA migrants.

On the contrary, in 2022, Ukrainian refugees experienced unprecedented support from the Czech government and Czech society. The securitisation process was not against Ukrainian refugees but toward Russia since the US considerably securitised Russia after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the dawn of the US securitisation of Russia, when the US and NATO designated Russia as the ultimate threat to the West, together with the Czech rapprochement to Atlanticism, it was understandable that the Czech government accepted a tremendous number of Ukrainian refugees. The Czech government portrayed Ukrainians as victims of Russian aggression who we must help. In April 2023, Czechia hosted approximately 325,000 Ukrainian refugees (Ministry of Interior 2023) – during the MENA refugee crisis, Czechia accepted only a few hundred of them.

Even though Ukrainian refugees were in general warmly welcomed, some opposition parties, such as ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) or SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy), were somewhat sceptical about accepting such a massive amount of people for a long-term stay. They first started to politicise and then securitise Ukrainian refugees, which turned into portraying them as a threat to Czech identity and sovereignty.

This article aims to grasp the differences in the securitisation of refugees between the MENA refugee crisis in 2015 and the Ukrainian refugee crisis in 2022 in Czechia.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above, governmental reactions differed considerably. The Czech government generally refused MENA refugees. On the contrary, Ukrainian refugees were, in sum, welcomed by the Czech government but not by the whole political spectrum. Hence, the article aims to provide answers to three questions:

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2 MENA refugee crises occurred in the 2015–2019 period. The Ukrainian refugee crisis began in February 2022 and is still ongoing, with its peak occurring in Spring 2022.

3 It is important to note from the outset that different political parties were in power during the two refugee crises examined in this paper – i.e. two distinct governments led Czechia in 2015 and in 2022 – shaping divergent political discourses and responses (Author's note).

*Q1: Which anti-Ukrainian refugee politicisation and securitisation discourses emerged during 2022, and who were the main actors of the Czech political sphere spreading those discourses?*

*Q2: Did the analysed politicians frame incoming Ukrainian refugees as a threat to Czech sovereignty, national identity, the state's economic system or individual welfare?*

*Q3: In which way did the politicisation and securitisation discourses that emerged during the MENA and Ukrainian crises differ, and why?*

The article will draw on the securitisation theory, the method-focused, structured comparison and the hefty empirical corpus of securitisation discourses to answer the presented research questions.

The article contributes to the debate on the politicisation and securitisation of refugees in domestic affairs, with an example from the Czech context. In the Czech context, one can primarily encounter research articles concerning the securitisation of Muslim refugees after 2015. To illustrate this, Kristýna Tamchynová (2017) analysed the interplay between securitisation and Europeanisation in Czechia after the MENA refugee crisis. Michal Tkaczyk (2017) studied speech acts related to migration in Czechia and sought to distinguish between politicisation and securitisation speech acts. Furthermore, Aliaksei Kazharski (2019) assumed that the Eurooptimist securitisation of peripherality, delineated by German domination, directly competes with the Eurosceptic securitisation of the EU as a sovereignty-infringing entity. Additionally, Clarissa Tabosa (2020) analysed the speech acts of the Czech and Slovak prime ministers to apprehend how both countries discursively constructed their foreign policy vis-à-vis the refugee crisis and how they were re-positioning themselves concerning refugee and the core-periphery spectrum of the EU. Oldřich Bureš and Robert Stojanov (2022) offer an exploratory analysis of experts' perceptions of the securitisation of immigration in the Czech Republic and its impact on Czech refugee policy in the aftermath of the 2015–2016 MENA-European refugee crisis. However, none of the above research discusses the novelty of the Ukrainian refugee crisis vis-à-vis securitisation discourses that emerged in society.

As outlined above, there is an evident absence of articles in the Czech context which analyse the politicisation and securitisation processes. Stepping out of the Czech context, studies trying to understand both processes concerning migration appeared. First, Alessandra Buonfino (2004) wrote about the circumstances under which politicisation and securitisation emerged, mainly in the UK and Italy. Later, Pietro Castelli Gattinara and Laura Morales (2017) looked in some detail at the link between public perceptions and issue securitisation, focusing on discursive choices of politicisation, issue framing and public opinion on immigration.

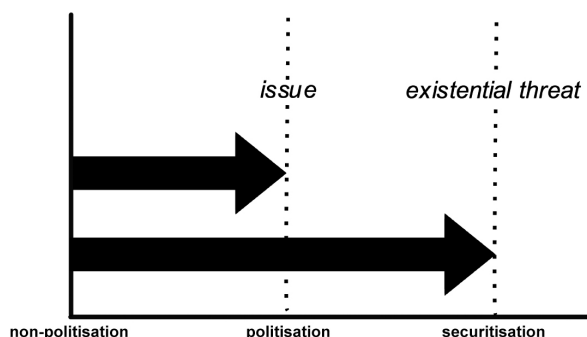
The following text is organised into five parts. The first presents the theoretical foundations for politicisation and securitisation based on its understanding within the Copenhagen School (CS). The second part outlines the research design. The third part then presents the basis of the MENA refugee crisis in Czechia in 2015–2019. The fourth part analyses the Ukrainian case. The Czech government's stance is then presented, followed by an analysis of the speech acts of the representatives of the Czech parliament's two opposition political party groups. The final part discusses the politicisation and securitisation discourses detected during the analysis of the Ukrainian refugee crisis and compares the MENA and Ukrainian refugee crises in Czechia.

## **Politicisation and securitisation**

The theoretical basis of politicisation and securitisation, first introduced in the 1990s by the Copenhagen School (CS), can be regarded as one of the most widely known theoretical assumptions. The CS offers a constructivist operational method for distinguishing the process of securitisation from that of politicisation for understanding what is and what is not a security issue (Buzan et al.: 1998: vii, 19). Said otherwise, the CS can help the analyst draw the line between processes of politicisation and processes of securitisation since not all issues are security issues (ibid.: 21).

The CS outlines that 'security is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitisation can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicisation' (ibid.: 23). On the contrary, politicisation revolves around issues that are part of public policy, requiring government decision, resource allocations or another form of communal governance. Politicisation means making the issue appear open, a matter of choice/something that is decided upon and that, therefore, entails responsibility. Those issues are still not viewed as security issues; they are too distant to lead to securitisation. However, once the issue is perceived as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure, that is when securitisation occurs. Moreover, between politicisation and securitisation, the state does not tackle non-politicised issues and is not even an issue of public debate. Additionally, politicisation and securitisation are essentially intersubjective processes; hence, it is always difficult to approach them objectively without knowing the context of the given issue in detail (ibid.: 23–24, 29–30).

Figure 1: Process of politicisation and securitisation



Source: Authors

The CS also points out that the speech actor producing the politicisation and securitisation discourses does not always have to be the government or a state. The CS postulates that politicisation and securitisation can also be enacted in other ways. Moreover, different social entities can raise an issue to the level of general consideration or even to the status of sanctioned urgency among themselves. Very often, politicisation and securitisation occur in the media and in public debates (ibid.: 24, 72).

Moreover, beyond the confines of the CS, it is imperative to briefly elucidate the relationship between politicisation, securitisation and democratic decision-making – particularly in light of the Czech Republic's post-1990s integration into the liberal-democratic milieu. It is generally acknowledged that much of the theoretical edifice, especially concerning securitisation, emerges from the context of Western liberal democracies (Roe 2012: 251; Neal 2019; Williams 2015), wherein the very foundations of the discipline of International Relations are situated (cf. Drulák&Rod 2025).

Turning specifically to the process of securitisation, one might contend that it constitutes a form of 'extraordinary politics' – that is, political interventions or decisions which deviate markedly from the normative procedures and expectations of liberal democratic governance. In contrast, 'normal politics' is typified by procedural regularity, transparency and institutional oversight. The exceptionality of security politics is thus rendered intelligible only in juxtaposition with this democratic normativity, wherein policymaking is subject to deliberation, public debate and legislative scrutiny, particularly of executive authority (Roe 2012: 251; see also Aradau 2004).

Furthermore, with respect to securitisation, scholarly debate reflects a tension. On one hand, critics have argued that securitisation can be inimical to democratic practice. It tends to impose rigid epistemological boundaries on what is to be perceived as negative or threatening, thereby eroding the openness

and accountability that underpins legislative deliberation in liberal democracies (Roe 2012: 250–251; Stefan 2009: 9). On the other hand, it has also been suggested that securitisation has become a legitimate and embedded component of democratic governance. In this view, the domain of security – once cloaked in secrecy and marked by exception – has increasingly become routinised within the fabric of everyday democratic politics (Neal 2019: 1).

## Research design

The research focuses on the principal parliamentary opposition actors, such as ANO and SPD. Those political parties became the leading politicisation–securitisation actors on the Czech scene. Speech acts<sup>4</sup> from ANO and SPD were collected from their official websites, press conferences and political proclamations, Czech media news sites and social media (Facebook and Twitter/X).

For data collection from Twitter/X, the tool *TwEportly* was used. Facebook posts were downloaded from the page of each member of parliament manually. Czech media news sites were analysed via manual content analysis. In this manner, tens of thousands of Facebook, Twitter and media posts and articles were gathered. However, most speech acts evolved on Twitter, where Czech politicians are tremendously active.

Moreover, a speech act – consistent with other research on securitisation (see Rod 2024) – was identified only when a direct quotation could be clearly attributed to the politician in question. In other words, paraphrased statements were excluded, as they cannot be reliably linked to a specific speech act. As a result, most speech acts were found on social media, where politicians speak in the first person, rather than in newspapers or on political websites, which predominantly featured paraphrased content.

The selected speech acts were subsequently analysed through a content analysis by using the following combinations of keywords related to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, which have been since used in Czech: ‘the name of the securitising actor’, ‘blahobyt’ (welfare), ‘migrace’ (migration), ‘uprchlík’ (refugee), ‘Ukrajina’ (Ukraine), ‘Ukrajinec’ (Ukrainian), ‘hrozba’ (threat), ‘riziko’ (risk), ‘suverenita’ (sovereignty), ‘ne/bezpečí’ (in/security), ‘the given year’ and ‘problém’ (issue). Besides this, the research solely analysed direct speech since the speech act is recorded verbatim in them and thus cannot be paraphrased.

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4 A speech act refers to the idea that saying something can bring about a change – in security studies, this means that labeling an issue as a security threat can socially construct it as such, regardless of whether the threat is objectively real. Securitisation is a discursive process in which an actor claims that a referent object faces an existential threat, demands the right to take extraordinary measures and convinces an audience that such measures are justified. This process elevates issues from non-politicised or politicised domains into the realm of emergency politics, legitimising actions that may bypass normal democratic procedures (Munster 2012).

Additionally, as outlined above, the research distinguishes the politicisation and securitisation process based on the presumptions of the CS, similar to what Tkaczyk (2017: 104) presented in his study, which sought to understand the differences between politicisation and securitisation. On the one hand, to designate a speech act as a politicisation act, the speech actor portrays Ukrainians as an issue for the political, societal or economic sector concerning the state or individual. In this case, the speech actor does not frame Ukrainians with a threat but with an issue that should be discussed in the political forum. On the other hand, to designate a speech act as a securitisation act, the speech actor has to portray Ukrainians as a threat, security risk or danger, potentially justifying an extraordinary measure to deal with the threat for the political, societal or economic sector.

The empirical corpus eventually revealed approximately seven thousand speech acts referring to the Ukrainian refugee crisis between the beginning of the war in Ukraine in February 2022 and the end of 2023. On the one hand, 71 ANO MPs produced nearly 1500 speech acts related to Ukrainian refugees. However, only nine speech acts contained moderate partial securitisation (politicisation), and two were marked as having securitisation discourse. On the other hand, 20 SPD MPs produced roughly 5500 speech acts related to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Fifty-six included partial securitisation (politicisation) and 33 were marked as having securitisation discourse. Hence, the subsequent analysis mainly focused on the detected securitisation discourses needed to compare with the precedent refugee crisis from the Middle East and Africa.

Moreover, the analysis also focused on whether the given speech actor emphasised what incoming Ukrainians pose a threat to. As mentioned in the previous section, the political, societal and economic sectors play a vital role in analysing the politicisation and securitisation of refugees. Hence, the research will specifically zoom in on whether the speech actors accented that the incoming Ukrainians seek to harm the Czech nation's identity (societal sector), Czech sovereignty (political sector), Czech state economic system or Czech individual welfare (economic sector).

The next step is to find the distinctions between the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises. Since the article aims not to provide a comparison analysis, it draws on the method of focused, structured comparison (SFC). SFC is ideal for scholars seeking to compare cases systematically yet avoiding standard comparative analysis. While not aimed at direct case comparison, it captures minor differences incidentally. SFC enables conditional generalisation of data, aiding practitioners in identifying new situations (George&Bennett 2004).

## **The 2015–2019 MENA-European refugee and Czechia**

The 2015–2019 refugee crisis highlights two key surprises in Czechia: the government's shift to a strict anti-migration stance despite previous openness, and



its conflict with the EU despite being a pro-European government. European countries' responses to the crisis varied based on their refugee experience and location along refugee routes. Countries with previous experience were generally welcoming, while those without experience, like Czechia and other Visegrad countries, rejected refugees. Frontline and destination countries supported pan-European redistribution of migrants, while transit countries and bystanders, including Visegrad countries, opposed it. The European Commission's refugee quotas faced strong opposition from the Visegrad group (Czechia, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary), which gained new legitimacy as a resistance force against Brussels. The crisis increased Euroscepticism and mistrust towards Germany, which advocated for refugees and quotas. Pro-European parties faced pressure to reassess their positions, causing internal tensions. Several factors explained the Visegrad countries' clashes with Brussels, including nationalism, illiberalism, populism, value differences with Western societies, self-interest and public opinion pressure. The literature covering the 2015 refugee crisis tends to oversimplify the Visegrad countries' perspectives and treats them as a unified bloc despite essential differences among them (Drulák 2024: introduction).

Moreover, if one shifts the analytical lens away from the governing coalition and turns attention to the principal opposition forces of the time – namely the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana, ODS) and TOP 09, a conservative-liberal party with pronounced pro-European commitments – a degree of ambivalence, if not scepticism, towards migration policy also becomes discernible. This position stands in notable contrast to the response evoked by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, during which a divergence in approach between governing and opposition parties became increasingly pronounced, as evidenced throughout the subsequent analysis.

In the case of the Syrian refugee influx, ODS, under the leadership of Petr Fiala, articulated a position of qualified humanitarianism. Fiala asserted that refugees fleeing the conflict should be offered temporary refuge, particularly on medical grounds, but should ultimately return once hostilities subsided. He cautioned against conferring permanent residency absent clear prospects for successful integration and critiqued what he perceived as a prevailing atmosphere of political correctness stifling open discourse. While this stance elicited disappointment from segments of the party's voter base, ODS leadership closed ranks in defence of Fiala's position, grounding their rationale in appeals to cultural coherence, civic responsibility and the necessity of maintaining control over migratory processes. Detractors, however, accused the party of veering towards populist posturing, a charge Fiala refuted by invoking the imperative of safeguarding both national identity and the core values underpinning the European project (Kálal 2015).



By contrast, Karel Schwarzenberg, former chairman of TOP 09 and a prominent figure within the Czech liberal-conservative tradition, adopted a markedly more humanitarian framing. In a speech delivered in 2015, Schwarzenberg identified the refugee crisis as a defining moral test for his generation, urging a response informed by empathy and historical consciousness. He reminded his audience that Czechs themselves had sought asylum abroad on several occasions – following the Munich Agreement in 1938, the Communist coup in 1948 and the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968 – and thus bore a moral responsibility to reciprocate the hospitality they had once received. Rejecting fearmongering and the politics of resentment, Schwarzenberg called instead for principled leadership grounded in European norms of solidarity, rule of law and human dignity. For him, these values were not merely rhetorical devices, but foundational principles worthy of defence – even at the expense of short-term political popularity (iRozhlas 2015).

As mentioned above, Czechia was one of the Visegrad countries rejecting incoming migrants from the Middle East. Key figures in the government between 2015 and 2019 considerably securitised the incoming migrants. For instance, in 2016, Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec provided one of the toughest securitisation discourses when he indicated that there could be paedophiles, psychopaths or terrorists among the incoming migrants (Martínek 2016). Other ministers also very often used very harsh rhetorical proclamations. Furthermore, the research conducted by Zdenek Rod (2024) examined how refugees were securitised in the Czech discourse. Distinguishing two strategies of the threat construction, he argues that the refugee was presented as a threat to the state rather than the nation. Therefore, the leaders called for reforming the EU migration framework rather than reaching for the restoration of national sovereignty. In addition, the government, in essence, skipped the politicisation phase and began to securitise from the beginning of the crisis; politicisation discourses played a marginal role.

Table 1: 2015–2019 MENA-European refugee crisis summarised

2015–2019 MENA-European refugee crisis	
Discursive Process	Prevailing securitisation
Threat to	Sovereignty and Identity
Victim	Czech citizens due to migrants from the MENA
Speech Actor(s)	Government (ANO and Social-Democrats)

Source: Authors

## The 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis and Czechia

The Ukrainian refugee crisis, in contrast to the MENA crisis, differed from the beginning. The coalition government led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala from ODS (Civic Democratic Party) welcomed Ukrainian refugees and served as the desecuritisation actor. Fiala often declared that ‘these people, people just like us, must have at least a minimum opportunity from us to get things for themselves and their children’ (Fiala, according to Kopecký 2022). A supportive stance was declared by Minister of Interior Vít Rakušan from STAN (Mayors and Independents) when he repetitively mentioned that the Czech state is ready to integrate Ukrainian refugees into Czech society and to ensure them a satisfied life in Czechia (Švihel 2023).

However, despite the open arms of the Czech government and Czech solidarity with Ukrainians, the securitisation process of refugees occurred. As presented in the following analysis, the leading actors became the opposition groups, such as ANO and SPD.

### Analysis of ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens)

Within the Czech political landscape, ANO serves as a catch-all party, recently shifting its focus to appeal to the traditional social-democratic voter base (Jelínek 2022).<sup>5</sup> As the largest opposition party, ANO commands 71 members of Parliament out of 200 and boasts the most substantial parliamentary club. Despite securing a *de facto* victory in the 2021 parliamentary elections, ANO found itself in the opposition due to limited coalition possibilities, aligning with the SPD. Notably, ANO MPs previously held government positions in 2013–2017 and 2017–2021, with crucial figure Andrej Babiš serving as prime minister in the latter term. ANO MPs played pivotal roles in addressing security aspects of the 2015–2019 MENA refugee crisis. In December 2023, a survey revealed ANO’s significant 34.5% public support, double that of the second most supported party, ODS, currently holding 15% public support in the government (ČTK 2023).<sup>6</sup> This widespread support and visibility highlight ANO’s influential position in traditional and online spaces.

As mentioned by Rod (2024), ANO was, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a significant securitisation actor of MENA refugees, displaying migrants as a threat both to Czech sovereignty and identity. Hence, it could have been assumed that ANO would follow its anti-immigrant rhetoric during the Ukrainian refugee crisis after 24 February 2022. However, the opposite happened. ANO did not securitise the incoming Ukrainians at all. Mostly, the

5 Some even suggested that they may have been attempting to attract former voters of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) (see Naxera 2024).

6 As of June 2025, public support for ANO stands at 30.1% (iDNES, 2025).

politicisation of some topics discussed below appeared only marginally. The empirical corpus also includes just two securitisation discourses that occurred in 2023. The politicisation of incoming Ukrainians prevailed over the securitisation. Hence, politicisation, which played a leading role in ANO speech acts compared to securitisation, will be first discussed.

The first series of politicisation discourses evolved around the Ukrainians living at the expense of Czech citizens, thus causing issues to Czech people's economic prosperity. The main speech actors supplementing these discourses were ANO leading figure Andrej Babiš and his parliamentary colleagues Romana Fischerová and Hubert Lang. Babiš generally framed the incoming migrants positively and expressed support for them. However, Babiš often used the Ukrainian refugees and ongoing energy crises to increase ANO's political gains. Throughout March and April 2022, Babiš accused Petr Fiala's government of completely forgetting about the Czech citizens afflicted by the energy crisis while helping the Ukrainians (Babiš 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d) fleeing war zones, often without any material possessions. Babiš's speeches suggested that the Ukrainians are stealing too much from economic benefits at the expense of Czech citizens.

Similarly to Babiš, on the one hand, Hubert Lang mentioned that 'we don't even have apartments for our people, and there is a tendency for Ukrainians to have priority' (Kopecký 2023). On the other hand, Romana Fischerová stated that she does not understand why the Czech Ministry of Interior is closing post offices for Czechs – the ministry's approach to reducing public spending – and opening post offices for Ukrainians (Fischerová 2023a). Fischerová was referring to the opening of the first branch of the Ukrainian post office, *Nova Post*, in Prague, which allows Ukrainians living in the Czechia to easily send post to Ukraine, as well as receive parcels, documents and even cargo (Echo24 2023).

Babiš, Lang and Fischerová, however, did not portray incoming Ukrainians as a threat to sovereignty or identity but as an issue to economic prosperity to the detriment of Czechs, thereby positioning Czech citizens as the primary referent object of intimidation. They did not even propose concrete measures to tackle the whole situation. All of them offered accusations without solutions. However, it is essential to say that Babiš, Lang and Fischerová's speeches were lauded merely within the margins of politicisation. They did not seek securitisation.

Moreover, completely unrelated politicisation discourse was further postulated by Pavel Růžička. Růžička, during the ongoing Ukrainian refugee influx, began reminding people that 'we must not forget Volhynia and Halych, where Ukrainian nationalists unleashed a massacre in which tens of thousands of Poles and Ukrainians died, as well as hundreds of Volhynian Czechs' (Růžička 2022). He reacted to the tweet of ODS MP Pavel Žáček, who said that we must not forget the victims of Russian aggression (ibid.). Although Růžička was stating a historical fact, the tweet's timing was unfortunate, considering the

heavy fighting in Ukraine during the first year of conflict when Ukrainians needed resolute support. Just a couple of months later, in Prague in March 2023, during antigovernmental demonstrations that sometimes carried anti-Ukrainian narratives, Růžička tweeted 'I would never put a Ukrainian flag on my house because my grandfather, a Volyn Czech, would be turning in his grave' (Růžička 2023). This tweet can also be considered a politicisation move since Růžička has served as an MP since 2017 and only mentioned this topic for the first time during the heated periods of the Ukraine War and anti-government demonstrations which combined opposition to the government and support for Ukraine. However, Růžička did not react to the threat to sovereignty, identity or economic prosperity.

Besides exceeding politicisation discourses, two particular securitisation discourses were produced by (aforementioned) Romana Fischerová and Jana Mračková Vildumetzová (JMV). On the one hand, Fischerová, known for her rhetoric concerning threats to economic prosperity, tweeted 'Guaranteeing loans to Ukraine and paying back their interest will drive us broke!' (Fischerová 2023b). Fischerová clearly stated that financial support to Ukraine could bring Czechia severe financial problems, mainly threatening the economic prosperity of the Czech state as a referent object, without supporting this statement with data or statistics. Although financial support to Ukraine is not negligible, there is no analysis showing that financial support to Ukraine would result in a broken Czech economy.

On the other hand, JMV was concerned with the security consequences of having Ukrainians, who had fled the war zones, in Czech territory. She first criticised Minister of Interior Vít Rakušan for mismanaging the migration flows and for not knowing how many Ukrainians resided in Czechia (Vildumetzová 2022), implicitly signalling it could be a security risk not to have all newly arrived Ukrainians under control. Later on, JMV stated that due to the Rakušan incompetencies and chaos creation regarding the management of the migration flows 'Czechia is setting itself up for a big problem with its lax approach and chaos' (Vildumetzová 2023).

JMV also added that this particular problem can result in security problems connected to the criminality of Ukrainians in Czechia (*ibid.*). Shortly after this statement, Minister Rakušan sought to desecuritize JMV's statement and reacted that:

We keep repeating that the security situation in the Czech Republic has not deteriorated despite the large number of Ukrainian refugees. I am glad that the BIS conclusions confirm this and thus refute the fears that some irresponsible politicians are feeding. (Šmejkal 2023)

Rakušan then added a link to the BIS (Czech civilian counterintelligence agency) report, which says:

The BIS did not record a deterioration of the security situation in the Czech Republic last year despite the massive migration wave from Ukraine. The disinformation scene the previous year returned from the topic of COVID-19 to support Russian activities after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (ibid.)

JVM not only securitised the Ukrainians but also used false narratives to legitimize her messaging. One can read from the paragraph mentioned above that JVM securitised incoming Ukrainians to Czechia as a threat to societal security and, thus, to Czech society.

ANO political party analysis showed that compared with previous years when ANO was in the government and securitised MENA migration, ANO MPs generally did not securitise incoming Ukrainians. However, politicisation emerged, as discussed above. A few securitisation discourses evolved around two securitisation discourses. First, securitisation discourses concerned financial support to Ukraine, potentially causing severe economic issues for the Czech state's economic prosperity. Second, securitisation discourses dwelled on severe problems stemming from mismanaged migration flows from Ukraine and Ukrainian criminality in Czechia, threatening Czech societal security. In conclusion, ANO did not see any risk in incoming Eastern European refugees compared to MENA in 2015.

## **Analysis of SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy)**

SPD is a political party in the Czech Republic that currently serves as the opposition to the ruling 5-party coalition government. Nowadays, the SPD party has a total of 20 parliamentary seats out of a total of 200. SPD's political platform emphasises direct democracy, strained relations with the UN and NATO, and a steadfast anti-EU stance. This includes policies aimed at anti-migration, particularly from the Middle East and Africa. With its attitudes, presentations, communication and campaigns, the party earned the epithet 'populist' in the specialist community (see, e.g. Charvát, Charvátová & Niklesová 2022). In December 2023, the survey showed 8.5% support for SPD,<sup>7</sup> which put it in fourth place and even ahead of the other three parties from the governing coalition (STAN, TOP 09 and KDU-ČSL) (ČTK 2023), which in the end represents almost one-tenth of Czech voters. It is not surprising that due to the anti-migration party stance, their attitude towards Ukrainian refugees differs from the Czech government's official strategy.

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7 As of June 2025, public support for SPD stands at 13.1% (iDNES 2025).

Although the Russian invasion had not yet occurred, Tomio Okamura, leader of SPD (and its most key actor), was already laying the groundwork for his party's politicisation and securitisation narratives about Ukrainians with a speech in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of Czechia. Okamura warned of a potential mass wave of migration crises from Ukraine, which could have two negative consequences if it were to happen: worsened security and undercut wages for Czech citizens in manual professions (c.a. to Stuchlíková 2022). As the Russian invasion and the ensuing Ukrainian refugee crisis unfolded, Okamura and SPD took a firm stance and began to solidify their position. SPD's approach to Ukrainian refugees differs from its traditional approach to Muslim migrants and differs from the official approach of Fiala's government. What initially seemed like a case of careful tiptoeing of politicisation speech acts shifted into considerable economic prosperity politicisation (the spring of 2022), followed by prosperity-societal politicisation and a few examples of societal securitisation (summer of 2022), then transformed into prosperity-societal securitisation (the end of 2022/beginning of 2023), fired into economic and societal and national security securitisation speech acts (the middle of 2023), and ended in persistent stagnation (the end of 2023). Our research proved that the socio-economic sector came first and was intertwined throughout time; therefore, it will be discussed first.

In the early stages of the crisis (February to May 2022), the SPD party, known for criticising migration from Muslim countries, approached culturally similar Ukrainians differently. Initially, SPD members aligned with Okamura's stance of 'Help the Ukrainians, but not at the expense of our people' (c.a. to Žabka 2022). SPD used the setup of 'we' vs 'they' in economic prosperity politicisation to blame the governing coalition. From the beginning, the main speech actors using such socio-economic discourse were mostly Tomio Okamura and Radovan Vich, and to a lesser extent Radek Rozvoral and Karla Maříková. Vich is a rare example of someone who politicised the Ukrainian situation in two ways, as he noted: 'Until now, our citizens could not have more apartments, but for Ukrainians, so suddenly it is possible.' (Vich 2022a).

However, Okamura became the key speech actor. Okamura used the same stand with an example of his widely used expression method (using surveys and polls): '[Due to Reality.idnes.cz] the reason is the influx of Ukrainian refugees. This rapidly increased rent prices and worsened the lack of apartments for our citizens. Fiala's government is not solving the situation' (Okamura 2022a). This was followed by another tweet, where he referred to a survey taken by STEM, citing: '70% of the population believes that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees will lead to a weakening of the social security of Czech citizens' and adding himself, 'I share the citizens' concerns and repeatedly warn the government about it. However, Prime Minister Fiala pretends not to listen, and even after two months, the government has no plan' (Okamura 2022b). In this phase, SPD



did not portray incoming Ukrainians as a threat to sovereignty or identity but as a threat to the socio-economic prosperity of Czech citizens. Czech citizens were used as the primary referent object being intimidated.

Okamura would use the following speech acts to more adeptly politicise and amplify the economic issue by citing other financial data on the support provided to all Ukrainian refugees (see, e.g. Okamura 2022c, 2022d). Such a move could deepen the gap between Ukrainians and Czech citizens, namely SPD supporters. Also, from the middle of 2022, SPD started to add the first bits of securitisation speech acts regarding polio, HIV cases and Roma-Ukrainian (see below). Despite this, the SPD's attitude towards Ukrainians was less antagonistic in the following six months (July 2022 to January 2023). There were only a few exceptions, such as socio-economic remarks from Okamura's side or comments from Vich like 'This government are going to bust us because of Ukraine!' (2022b). SPD focused more on the securitisation of migration from the south (MENA) and mainly on supporting their candidate, Jaroslav Bašta, for the presidential post because of the approaching Czech presidential elections in mid-January 2023.

At the outset of 2023, the SPD party appeared to make a strong start after the presidential elections. During a press conference in late February, Okamura (2023a) made remarks about the 'Ukrainization' of the Czech nation, which sparked a new phase of discussion around Ukrainian politics and security. However, subsequent SPD internet posts appeared to be disorganised and lacked coherence. The posts aimed to draw attention to (1) the amount of money spent by the Czech Republic on supporting Ukraine and Ukrainians, (2) the Fiala government's support for the EU migration pact, which the SPD alleges would result in the Czech Muslim/Islamic Republic and (3) their resistance to Ukraine's entry into the EU, or (4) unregulated inflation in the CR. This trend, combined with the politicisation of the decline in the welfare of Czechs at the expense of Ukrainians, persisted until August 2023. However, throughout 2023, SPD already carried more security narratives in the speech acts. Subsequently, we will examine when and how the security of the individual and the nation was added next to the socio-economic issue.

As mentioned, the first bits of securitisation that expanded the economic scope and narratives occurred in the middle of 2022. Okamura brought forth a new health topic during the ongoing discussion on social welfare (supporting Ukrainians and not Czech citizens) for the first time in May 2022. He pointed out that Czech public health officials were aware of the reemergence of polio among Ukrainian refugees (Okamura 2022e). Later in the month, he referenced renowned Czech epidemiologist Roman Prymula's findings on the rising cases of HIV infections (Okamura 2022f). Other party members, including Rozvoral (2022) and Maříková (2022b), spoke about the Ukrainian impact on national and societal security but failed to provide concrete examples or solutions when



both said: 'By failing to manage the wave of migration, the government threatens the safety of citizens and their social and health security. We want our decent, hard-working citizens to continue living a peaceful, contented life.' At the same time, it was evident that SPD leader Okamura dominated the conversation on Twitter, frequently discussing the issue of Ukrainian migration and utilising targeted speech acts. Okamura then began to expand the migration issue with Roma-Ukrainian refugee cases, characterising them as unadaptable and asserting that Czech citizens had no desire for them to live among them (Okamura 2022g). Meanwhile, the Fiala government was compelling Czech municipalities to accept them (Okamura 2022h). This was, along with Rozvoral and Maříková, the first time politicisation shifted into societal securitisation.

However, the discernible shift in the SPD's security discourse towards Ukrainians didn't appear until 8 August 2023, during the Pilsen rape case. Despite the perpetrator being a long-standing Ukrainian immigrant in the Czech Republic, SPD leveraged this incident within their evolving securitisation narrative against current refugees. Rozvoral and Maříková reflected the SPD's standpoint, indicating a denial of automatic immigration rights for Ukrainians in the Czech Republic, saying 'anyone who is a security risk should be deported' (Rozvoral 2023a, 2023b; Maříková 2023). The emphasis on labelling individuals as immigrants rather than refugees underscored SPD's deviation from Czech intrastate policies. Such discourse was once again bolstered by Radovan Vich's (2023) tweet, highlighting the perceived improvement in the Ukrainian refugees' situation at the expense of Czech citizens with the blame pointed at the Czech government. Okamura (2023b) even further implicated the EU in SPD's rhetoric by asserting that criminal Ukrainians could not be deported due to EU policies. Okamura blamed not only Fiala's government but also EU policy. However, the speech act again did not offer an alternative or solution, only stating 'The SPD advocates that the residence permits in the Czech Republic be terminated for foreigners who have been convicted of a crime' (ibid.).

In mid-August 2023, Okamura deliberately combined all the mentioned politicised and securitised aspects above. Together with a citation of the PAQ Research Agency, he claimed that more than half of the Ukrainian refugees wanted to stay in Czechia, reminding us that it was the government's fault and citing his own words: 'due to their [government] lies, we [Czech citizens] will pay for it [Ukrainians], and also, we will suffer from increasing criminality' (Okamura 2023c). Later, he tried to highlight a statement from a Novinky.cz survey, purporting that 81% of Czechs correlated nationality with the propensity for criminality (Okamura 2023d). Okamura continued to position his stance against the government, accusing it of prioritising Ukrainians over its citizens, especially in the wake of subsequent assaults in Prague and Brno. As August unfolded, Okamura's rhetoric intensified, employing more provocative language to depict Ukrainian refugees as 'demoralised elements' (Okamura 2023e, 2023f). He amplified fears about the

deteriorating security situation concerning Ukrainians, framing it as a failure of Fiala's government. This 'us vs. them' narrative, emphasising that the country belonged to Czech citizens rather than 'foreigners' (Ukrainians), became a recurring theme in Okamura's speeches throughout the rest of August.

As one can tell, Okamura emerged as a distinctive figure within SPD, employing compelling storytelling techniques to convey his messages. This ability was evident in September 2023 when he capitalised on reports of harassment and attacks attributed to Ukrainians. His succinct narratives painted Ukrainians as aggressors needing to return to Ukraine due to inherent cultural differences which led to increased conflicts with Czech citizens. He wrote:

The time has come for Ukrainian 'refugees' to start returning home to non-combat territories. Ukrainians have a different mentality, and logically – clashes with Czech citizens will increase. Unfortunately, not solving the problem with the vast number of Ukrainian immigrants in our territory will only increase mutual animosity. (Okamura 2023g)

Such speech acts were strategically intertwined with the Pilsen case from August.

However, October 2023 witnessed a shift in focus for SPD as final negotiations on the new EU migration pact and its approval by the Czech government dominated discussions. The narrative veered away from Ukrainians and towards migration from the MENA region, aligning with SPD's anti-EU stance and its inclination towards border closure and self-determination. November did not bring any shift – the discussions around the EU migration pact and MENA migration overshadowed the earlier securitisation of Ukrainians. Furthermore, geopolitical concerns related to Ukraine, such as the ongoing war and responsibility for oil pipelines, took precedence over the refugee discourse. Only at the end of November did Okamura present a new slogan prioritising the financial needs of Czechs over Ukrainians, which was kind of a reminder of economic securitisation and political divergence from Ukraine.

In December 2023, the SPD trajectory concerning Ukrainian refugees showed no substantive deviation, maintaining a politicised stance pivoting toward economic concerns. Okamura's recurrent (2023h) slogan, 'Not even a haler for the Ukrainians! Zero. Funds for Czech citizens!' underscored this continued socio-economic narrative. Concurrently, there was an observable intensification in rhetoric regarding migration from the MENA region, mainly linked to Okamura's foreign engagement during his visit to Italy, where he met with Italian Vice Prime Minister Matteo Salvini. This development marked the inception of SPD's aspirations towards the European Parliament, aiming to advocate for preserving the Czech Republic's sovereignty, opposition to illegal migration and Islamisation, and resistance against initiatives such as the Green Deal or measures perceived as censorship.

The analysis of the SPD political party reveals that, despite apparent efforts to develop meaningful strategies of politicisation and securitisation, the discourse presented above actually comes across as somewhat incoherent and inconsistent. From a comprehensive perspective, the discourse of the investigated SPD MPs can be characterised as a cautious alignment with or reinforcement of Okamura's approach. Okamura, in turn, assumed a *sui generis* role in the broader process of politicisation and subsequent securitisation. The initial framing of the issue as one of prosperity and well-being transformed into a security concern prompted by criminal cases involving Ukrainians. The initial stages of politicisation and securitisation primarily revolved around financial assistance for Ukrainian refugees, raising concerns about potential adverse economic repercussions for the Czech state and its citizens. Subsequently, securitisation discourses shifted focus to the significant challenges posed by criminal incidents involving Ukrainians and the influx of refugees from Ukraine to Czechia. These developments were portrayed as threats to Czech societal security, as well as to Czech nationality and the nation. Notably, the discourse lacked any association with comprehensive solutions. Instead, the predominant stance advocated for the deportation of Ukrainians with a criminal background. In summary, SPD's approach to Ukrainian refugees differs from its traditional approach to MENA refugees.

## Comparison of the 2015 and 2022 refugee crises

The next part involves comparing the characteristics of the 2015 MENA migration crisis and the 2022 refugee crisis. Notably, these two crises differ in various aspects of analysis, including threat perception and the actors involved in the discourse (see the following paragraphs and Table no. 1).

On the one hand, politicians began securitising incoming MENA refugees from the beginning of the MENA crisis in 2015. Politicisation occurred sporadically. However, politicians often proposed concrete measures to reduce the threat of incoming MENA refugees, especially by calling for reform in the EU migration framework. On the other hand, during the Ukrainian refugee crisis, politicisation and securitisation acts were predominantly represented. Their focus was primarily on instilling fear among Czech citizens about the arrival and settlement of Ukrainians in Czechia. However, they failed to present any concrete solutions.

Furthermore, the crises exhibited differences in their perception of threats. In the MENA refugee crisis, politicians emphasised that incoming refugees posed a significant threat to the Czech identity due to their diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. They argued that accepting the EU relocation quotas directly jeopardised Czech sovereignty. However, in the subsequent crisis, considerations of sovereignty and identity played a marginal role, if any. As

Ukrainians entered Czechia, discourses portrayed them as a threat to the Czech population's economic prosperity, social welfare, social security or national security, with a particular emphasis on the socio-economic aspect. Politicians contended that after receiving humanitarian aid, housing and economic benefits, Ukrainians were better off than the average Czech citizen. Consequently, the focus shifted from the state to society. In this latter case, politicians predominantly asserted that Ukrainians posed a threat to Czech society rather than the Czech state.

Finally, as alluded to in the introduction, the third and ultimate distinction lies in the involvement of speech actors. In the MENA refugee crisis, the primary speech actor was the government, with limited support for incoming MENA refugees in the parliament. The dynamics shifted in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Ukrainians enjoyed comprehensive governmental support, but the opposition did not share the same sympathies for incoming Ukrainians. Consequently, the securitisation discourse gained traction in the parliament, particularly among opposition parties such as ANO and SPD. Those above can be succinctly encapsulated by delving into the fundamental identity of the victim in question. Amidst the MENA crisis, the governmental narrative delineated Czech citizens as victims, attributing this status to the influx of migrants from said region. Conversely, in the milieu of the Ukrainian crisis, the opposition portrayed Czech citizens as victims, attributing this status to the presence of Ukrainian refugees, who are concurrently depicted as victims by both the Czech government and the opposition within the broader context of Russian aggression.

**Table 2: Comparison of 2015–2019 MENA-European and 2022–2023 Ukrainian refugee crisis**

2015–2019 MENA-European refugee crisis	
Discursive Process	Prevailing securitisation
Threat to	Sovereignty and Identity
Victim	Czech citizens due to migrants from the MENA
Speech Actor(s)	Government (ANO and Social-Democrats)
2022–2023 Ukrainian refugee crisis	
Discursive Process	Politicisation and securitisation
Threat to	Economic prosperity, social welfare and social security
Victim	Czech citizens due to Ukrainian victims due to Russian aggression
Speech Actor(s)	Parliamentary opposition parties (ANO and SPD)

Source: Authors

## Conclusions

In the end, it is vital to ask – what do both the MENA and Ukrainian refugee crises tell us about the Czech government and society? The first characteristic lies on the cultural-religious level. On the one side, incoming MENA, mostly Muslim refugees, were not only unwelcome by the political representation at that time (after 2015) but they were also not generally welcome by society. The apprehension of the unknown might have shaped the initial perception of Muslim migrants as a security concern (refer to Carleton 2016). Alternatively, this perception could have been influenced by the November 2015 Paris attacks, which remained fresh in people's memories and resulted in the tragic loss of over 130 lives and injuries to approximately 400 individuals.<sup>8</sup> Early surveys during the migration crisis revealed that 45.5% of Czech respondents expressed discomfort with the idea of having Muslims as neighbours. Muslims were identified as the second least-favoured group in Czechia, following the Roma minority (Hafez 2018: 439).

On the other side, while the parliamentary opposition parties (ANO and SPD) took a securitised approach to incoming Ukrainian refugees, the Czech government and the majority of Czech society generally extended support to Ukrainian refugees, particularly in the initial months of the conflict in Ukraine. The reason behind this lies in the fact that, before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, almost two hundred thousand Ukrainians lived and worked in Czechia (Ministry of Interior 2021: 1). People were accustomed to having Ukrainians as neighbours or colleagues, albeit often in lower-paying jobs. Furthermore, Ukrainians share Slavic and Christian origins with Czechs, minimising cultural and religious differences. However, by the latter half of 2023, surveys indicated a slight decline in support for Ukrainian refugees. Most individuals expressed a desire to continue supporting them but only until the conclusion of the war, as noted in a survey conducted by STEM Institute for Empirical Research (Tvrdoň 2023). Sociologist Jaromír Mazák explains that the Czech public tends to be conservative and resistant to change, preferring to adhere to familiar norms. This inclination is evident in the overall attitude towards migration, where the current positive reception of Ukrainian refugees is not always rooted in the belief that their arrival brings tangible benefits such as a new workforce or incentives. In this context, people in the region generally do not view the narrative of migration positively (Mazák, as reported by Český rozhlas 2023).

Last but not least, as evidenced in the text, politicisation and securitisation carry practical implications. Currently, politicisation itself is not inherently perilous. However, it harbours the risk of fostering conditions conducive to further

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8 Afterwards, other Islamist terrorist attacks took place in Nice, Berlin, Brussels, Barcelona, Manchester and London in the 2016–2017 period.

securitisation endeavours. Politicisation acts as a catalyst for securitisation. The more protracted the politicisation, the more profound the subsequent impact of securitisation. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognise that one actor's politicisation narratives can bolster another's securitisation narratives. The analysis indicates that ANO was predominantly subject to politicisation, whereas SPD was characterised by securitisation. As ANO constitutes the largest parliamentary party, it played a role in maintaining the topic of refugees and migration in the public discourse, thereby inadvertently aiding SPD. Consequently, SPD was able to utilise the segment of public discourse that negatively portrayed Ukrainian refugees to propagate its securitisation narratives.

Lastly, one cannot overlook the recurring refugee crisis blooming in the Sahel and Northern Africa, creating pressure in the South European states such as Spain and Italy. During the analysis, the authors noticed that the opposition parties were simultaneously securitising the new migration threat from MENA and how the EU approached it. The same goes for the current government run by Prime Minister Petr Fiala. Although the government supports Ukrainian refugees, it perceives recurring MENA migration as a danger to both European and Czech Security. According to Prime Minister Petr Fiala, more than the European migration policy is needed to counter northern Africa's migration flows (iRozhlas 2023). Hence, a new series of various securitisation narratives towards MENA refugees appear once again, like in 2015. Czechia faces an upcoming parliamentary election in October 2025. Migration, especially MENA, is highly expected to be one of the leading topics. Further research on the securitisation of migrants in Czechia will be needed then.

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**Zdeněk Rod** has been serving as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Security Studies, CEVRO University in Prague, since 2025. He is also the Head of Research at the CEVRO Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS). He also serves as an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of International Relations at the Prague University of Economics and Business. In addition, he is a Visiting Fellow at the John Lukacs Institute for Strategy and Politics at the University of Public Service in Budapest and Co-Director of the Center for Security Consulting. He earned his, Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of West Bohemia in 2024 and has pursued academic studies in Ljubljana, Budapest, and at the European Security and Defence College in Brussels. Previously, he worked as a researcher and lecturer at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and as a policy expert at the Czech Ministry of Defence and has published exten-

sively in journals and books with leading publishers such as Oxford University Press, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Routledge, and Palgrave Macmillan. His commentaries have also appeared in prominent outlets including the RAND Corporation, SAIS Review of International Affairs, Defence News, and The Diplomat. E-mail: zdenek.rod@cevro.cz; ORCID: 0000-0002-2958-8288.

**Miroslav Plundrich** is an assistant professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations of West Bohemian University in Pilsen and CEO of „Bezpečnostní konference v Plzni“. His primary focus is conflict management, and his, Ph.D. thesis focused on recognizing negative nonstate actors in the international system. He is also interested in migration, hybrid warfare, the politics of the US and the UK in world affairs, and the security affairs of the Middle East. Next to the academy, he is currently collaborating with the Chief of the Czech Armed Forces General Staff as a member of the Civilian Advisory Group and did special analyses for the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. E-mail: plundrim@ff.zcu.cz; ORCID: 0000-0002-8839-2525.