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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The European Union's response to transnational repression: Are we moving towards securitisation?

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Abstract
The article explores how European Union (EU) democracies respond to the transnational repression phenomenon. Authoritarian transnational repression has become an increasingly recurrent phenomenon in recent years. However, we still have an inadequate understanding of how Western democracies respond to such forms of authoritarian interference. This article sheds light on the EU's responses to the authoritarian transnational repression phenomenon by using the analytical framework of securitisation as its theoretical approach. In doing so, it aims to find out the extent to which transnational repression has been securitised in the EU. The study demonstrates that the EU's response to the transnational repression phenomenon exhibits the case of a failed securitisation. The paper draws its analysis from policy documents, semi-structured interviews with EU stakeholders, and descriptive analysis from the Freedom House Transnational Repression Database.

Keywords: authoritarian interference; authoritarianism; European Union; securitisation; transnational repression

Introduction

In June 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recognised that transnational repression is a growing concern that undermines the rule of law and human rights in Europe.[1] From Chinese unofficial police stations to the assassination attacks perpetuated by Russian or Iranian secret agents on their citizens and diaspora communities residing abroad, authoritarian states are becoming increasingly emboldened and assertive in projecting their power onto their population across borders. The sociologist Dana Moss defines this phenomenon as transnational repression. In such context, as argued by Moss,[2] 'the population abroad cannot fully exit from authoritarianism, and those with domestic opportunities for protest remain constrained in the exercise of their rights, liberties, and "voice"'. As observed in the scholarly literature, such practices form an extension of the pursuit by authoritarian governance of regime security and represent an extension of domestic political control and governance, which spans across territorial borders.[3] As the emerging literature on transnational repression demonstrates, authoritarian states have quickly adapted

[1]Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE), 'Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights' (2023), available at {https://rm.coe.int/transnational-repression-as-a-growing-threat-to-the-rule-of-law-and-hu/1680ab5b07}.

[2]Dana Moss, 'Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring', *Social Problems*, 63:4 (2016), pp. 480–91 (p. 481).

[3]Saipira Furstenberg, Edward Lemon, and John Heathershaw, 'Spatialising state practices through transnational repression', *European Journal of International Security*, 6:3 (2021), pp. 358–78.

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to changes induced by globalisation and technologies to ensure their survival. Dictators are becoming increasingly flexible in using their repression tools to contain new forms of dissent and security challenges arising from their population abroad. Through tactics such as physical threats, Interpol arrest warrants, and digital surveillance, authoritarian states are not shying away from silencing their critics abroad, even in democracies.

So far, the emerging literature on transnational repression has examined the contours of the transnational repression phenomenon, and its tactics and strategies,[4] and has explained conditions that drive authoritarian states to engage in the transnational repression phenomenon.[5] Scholars have also reflected on the effects of transnational repression on human rights and state sovereignty.[6] Yet, we still lack knowledge on how European democracies respond to such forms of authoritarian interference. The question is important to investigate, given Europe's strong stance against foreign interferences in democracies, at least at the rhetorical level. In its January 2024 Conclusions on the European Union's (EU) priorities in United Nations (UN) human rights fora, the Foreign Affairs Council committed to considering measures to prevent and tackle transnational repression and encouraged actions at the UN to address this increasingly concerning global phenomenon.[7] Similar echoes resonated in the recent G7 Statement, where members of the group, including the EU, have committed to 'building resilience against malign foreign interference and acts of transnational repression that seek to undermine trust in government, society and media, reduce civic space and silence critical voices'.[8]

This article explores the EU's responses to the authoritarian transnational repression phenomenon by using the analytical framework of securitisation. The study demonstrates that transnational repression has not been securitised according to the Copenhagen School's strict formulation of existential threat. In doing so, the article makes several contributions. First, it contributes to the emerging literature on transnational repression by examining how democracies respond to transnational repression phenomenon. Second, it advances securitisation theory applied to the level of regional and multilateral institutions and the processes involved in the collective construction of, and responses to, the challenges of perceived transnational threats. Finally, the analysis further helps us to advance our understanding of failed securitisation cases – how 'the appeal of

[4]Moss, 'Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring'; Furstenberg et al., 'Spatialising state practices through transnational repression'; Marcus Michaelsen, 'Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state', *Globalizations*, 15:2 (2018), pp. 248–64; Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw, *Dictators without Borders: Power and Money in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017); Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'Global autocracies: Strategies of transnational repression, legitimation, and co-optation in world politics', *International Studies Review*, 23:3 (2020), pp. 616–44.

[5]Marlies Glasius, 'Extraterritorial authoritarian practices: A framework', *Globalizations*, 15:2 (2018), pp. 179–97; Alexander Dukalskis, Saipira Furstenberg, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Redmond Scales, 'The long arm and the iron fist: Authoritarian crackdowns and transnational repression', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2023), pp. 1051–79, available at: {https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027231188896}; Marcus Michaelsen and Kris Ruijgrok, 'Autocracy's long reach: Explaining host country influences on transnational repression', *Democratization*, 1:2 (2023), pp. 290–31; Francesca Lessa and Lorena Balardini, 'No safe haven: Operation Condor and transnational repression in South America', *International Studies Quarterly*, 68:2 (2024), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae035}; Rebecca Cordell and Kashmiri Medhi, 'Transnational repression: International cooperation in silencing dissent', *International Studies Quarterly*, 68:3 (2024), sqae108.

[6]Marcus Michaelsen and Johannes Thumfart, 'Drawing a line: Digital transnational repression against political exiles and host state sovereignty', *European Journal of International Security*, 8:2 (2023), pp. 151–17; Sienna Anstis, Noura Al-Jizawi, and Ron Deibert, 'Transnational repression and the different faces of sovereignity', *Temple Law Review*, 95:4 (2023), pp. 641–60.

[7]Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2024' (2024), available at: {https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5311-2024-INIT/en/pdf}.

[8]'G7 Foreign Ministers' meeting communiqué (Capri, April 19, 2024): Addressing global challenges, fostering partnerships' (2024), available at: {https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/comunicati/2024/04/g7-foreign-ministers-meeting-communique-capri-april-19-2024-addressing-global-challenges-fostering-partnerships/};

G7, 'Resilient democracies statement' (2022), available at: {https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57543/2022-06-27-g7-resilient-democracies-statement-data.pdf}.

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security is rejected or resisted'[9] and why some threats take a societal salience and others not.[10] Therefore, this study reflects on what the failure to securitise transnational repression within the EU tells us about security construction and importantly about (in)securitisation processes taking place in a multilateral governance system. The article is structured in three parts. First, the theoretical framework of securitisation is outlined and applied to the EU as a case study. The second section offers a discussion on methods. The third section presents the analysis of key findings. The article concludes with a discussion on the findings in relation to securitisation theory.

Theoretical framework: Securitisation

The original formulation of securitisation theory is associated with the Copenhagen School (CS) of security studies, which has revitalised the international security theory in the post–Cold War environment and inspired a burgeoning literature that applied its insights on a range of topics and contexts. At the heart of securitisation theory is the idea that security issues are socially constructed by political actors through the process of speech act.[11] In the words of Ole Wæver 'by uttering "security", a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it'.[12] Under these circumstances, a problem would become a security issue whenever so defined by power-holders. Such a philosophical approach to securitisation thus emphasises on the language of security and explains how through the process of speech acts and political discourse an issue is lifted from ordinary politics to a security issue that requires urgent attention or extraordinary measures.[13] Schematically, the core concept of securitisation proceeds as follows: an issue becomes a security issue through the 'securitising speech act' voiced to a 'specific audience' by a 'securitising actor' who designates an issue as 'fundamentally threatening to something' and which requires 'extraordinary' urgent security measures. Securitisation becomes successful when the securitising agent and the audience reach an acceptance of the common threat perception and the extraordinary measures to be taken.[14]

Since its original formulation, nearly all aspects of the securitisation theory have been revisited and redefined. While recognising its major contribution to security studies, scholars have pointed out the weaknesses of the CS, particularly in relation to the 'elite rhetoric', the role of securitising actor(s) and the audience. In the following, I review these critiques in relation to our present study.

First, the original formulation of the CS assumes that the securitising actor is a political state entity who has the authority to speak of power because it occupies government office and can thus claim to act on behalf of the state.[15] Yet, as noted by Sperling and Webber,[16] the rise of new transnational security challenges, such as climate change, terrorism, and health pandemics, has required a collective response from states.[17] Increasingly, states rely on international and regional organisations to deal with transnational security challenges.[18] State representatives can delegate their authority to international organisations which, through the proclamations and actions of

[9] Jan Ruzicka, 'Failed securitization: Why it matters', *Polity*, 51:2 (2019), pp. 365–77; Mark Salter, 'When securitization fails: The hard case of counter-terrorism programs', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 116–31.

[10] Johan Eriksson, *Threat Politics: New Perspectives on Security, Risk and Crisis Management* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[11] Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

[12] Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and desecuritization', in Ronnie D. Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 46–87 (p. 55).

[13] Laustsen Bagge and Ole Wæver, 'In defence of religion: Sacred referent objects for securitization', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 29:3 (2000), pp. 705–39.

[14] Buzan et al., *Security*.

[15] Buzan et al., *Security*.

[16] James Sperling and Mark Webber, 'The European Union: Security governance and collective securitisation', *West European Politics*, 42:2 (2019), pp. 228–60 (p. 233).

[17] See also Mark Salter, 'Securitization and desecuritization: A dramaturgical analysis of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 11 (2008), pp. 321–49.

[18] Sperling and Webber, 'The European Union'.

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designated agencies, might in turn engage in the practice of securitisation.[19] Such an approach necessitates viewing a securitisng actor beyond the state level and instead situates actorness in terms of collective securitisation.[20] Sperling and Webber define collective securitisation as 'a security process in which the actor in question acts on behalf of other empowered actors who themselves may have individual securitizing imperatives'.[21] In the EU context, EU actorness is 'a consequence of particular legal and political prerogatives which provide it with authority to speak and to act in the security field in its own right'.[22] Such rights, however, are circumscribed by Member States' preferences. This implies that the EU actorness derives directly from the Member States' interactions over the meaning of security and how policies are formulated in response to perceived threats. In this sense, the actorness of the EU is also bound up with the relationship it enjoys with its Member States, all of which are security actors in their own right but also constitute simultaneously the audience through the process of recursive interactions.[23] Accordingly, the securitising actor is the agent who explicitly links together the social construction of the threat with socially acceptable governance or policy measures.[24]

Second, the initial formulation of the CS lacks precision in defining the audience and who constitutes the audience in practice.[25] According to the CS, security threats are constructed through intersubjective processes between securitising actors (socially authorised security 'speakers') and audiences, and the issue is securitised only if and when the audience accepts it as such.[26] The audience forms an essential aspect of the intersubjective character of securitisation theory, the creation of shared security meanings, and the justification of security policies.[27] Yet, its nature and its role in securitisation, as pointed out by some scholars, are weakly defined.[28] In this view, more recent scholarship has focused on the impact of the audience on the securitising move. The study by Adam Côté, for instance, reveals that actions and the influence of the audience vary significantly across cases.[29] In a similar vein, Balzacq and colleagues[30] suggest that multiple audiences may exist within a single securitisation process, and those audiences often possess different powers and influence, leading to differing effects on securitisation outcomes.[31] In line with this, in the context of the EU, Member States are security actors in their own right but also constitute simultaneously the audience. In such an instance, securitisation is produced through the process of recursive interaction and intersubjective interaction.[32] In this setting, the distinction between actor and audience is consequently blurred. As observed by Sonia Lucarelli, securitisation results from both a securitising move by the EU institutions (i.e. the European Commission, European Council) and the interaction between its Member States (audience and securitising actors).[33] This has been visible in the securitisation of the Schengen area or European energy security, when securitisation was

[19] Ibid., p. 241.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., p. 236.
[22] Ibid., p. 232.
[23] Ibid., p. 235
[24] Sonia Lucarelli, 'The EU as a securitising agent? Testing the model, advancing the literature', *West European Politics*, 42:2 (2019), pp. 413–36.
[25] Adam Côté, 'Agents without agency: Assessing the role of the audience in securitization theory', *Security Dialogue*, 47:6 (2016), pp. 541–58; Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 71–90.
[26] Buzan et al., *Security*, p. 40.
[27] Adam Côté, 'Agents without agency: Assessing the role of the audience in securitization theory', *Security Dialogue*, 47:6 (2016), pp. 541–58.
[28] See Côté, 'Agents without agency'; Léonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory'.
[29] Côté, 'Agents without agency'.
[30] Thierry Balzacq, Sarah Léonard, and Jan Ruzicka, '"Securitization" revisited: Theory and cases', *International Relations*, 30(4) (2016), pp. 494–31. See also Léonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory'.
[31] See also Côté, 'Agents without agency', p. 547
[32] Léonard and Kaunert, 'Reconceptualizing the audience in securitization theory'.
[33] Lucarelli, 'The EU as a securitising agent?', p. 422.

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initiated by Member States acting as security actors who have guided the Council in the iterative securitisation process with the Commission.[34]

Third, the construction of the 'threat' may take different forms, which include not just discourses but also certain social practices.[35] Balzacq and colleagues, for instance, argue that 'scholars need not only to account for the performative nature of utterances, but also to examine the (perlocutionary) effects of these words, as well as the conditions of possibility of security practices'.[36] , According to these authors, the original formulation of the CS is theoretically weak and methodologically restrictive, as discursive practices and speech acts provide little understanding of how security operates.[37] In his seminal work, Thierry Balzacq and others associated with the so-called Paris School advocate for a 'sociological approach of securitization',[38] where securitisation occurs through social practices, context, and power relations that characterise the construction of the threat image.[39] Such an approach promotes a 'pragmatic' view of securitisation as a 'kaleidoscope of practices'[40] and includes non-discursive practices where invocation of security is not reducible to a linguistic form only but occurs through day-to-day bureaucratic practices and routines, as well as diffuse forms of power in decentralised networks.[41] In the context of the EU, for instance, Balzacq suggests that practices of securitisation can be studied by examining the 'empirical referents of policy' – policy tools or instruments – that the EU utilises to alleviate public problems defined as threat.[42] Analytically and in the context of the present paper, such an alternative formulation of securitisation is particularly relevant, given the multifaceted identity of the EU, where authority and policy-making influence are shared across multiple layers of governance and institutions. It allows us to examine the interaction between securitising actors, audience, and context and further sheds light not only on how security is constructed but also where it plays out in terms of processes, and practices – such as policy tools, configurations, and bureaucratic and technocratic rationalities, among others.[43] That said, understanding how security issues are framed through speech acts still remains highly relevant. In the case of the EU, as argued by Lucarelli, the speech act is articulated through official policy documents addressed to the audience and actors already embedded within the structure of the EU governance.[44]

Finally, although securitisation theory provides us with important analytical insights to study the securitisation process, the theory does not offer satisfactory explanations for why certain issues fail to be securitised. As rightly pointed out by Salter, failed securitising moves are not desecuritising moves, which entail a reversal of a previous successful securitisation.[45] Instead, failed securitisation is instances where securitisation moves did not occur or were rejected.[46] Jan Ruzicka

[34]Ibid.

[35]Didier Bigo, 'Internal and external aspects of security', *European Security*, 15:4 (2006), pp. 385–404.

[36]Thierry Balzacq, Tugba Basara, Didier Bigo, Emmanuel-Pierre Guittet, and Christian Olsson, 'Security practices', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (2010), p. 3, available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780191842665.001.0001}.

[37]Balzacq, Léonard, and Ruzicka, '"Securitization" revisited'.

[38]Thierry Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization: Origins, core assumptions, and variants', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–30 (p. 22).

[39]See Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

[40]Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization'; see also Thierry Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context', *European Journal of International Relations*, 11:2 (2005), pp. 171–201.

[41]Thomas Diez, Franziskus von Lucke, and Zehra Wellmann, *The Securitisation of Climate Change: Actors, Processes and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 8.

[42]Thierry Balzacq, 'The policy tools of securitization: Information exchange, EU foreign and interior policies', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46:1 (2008), pp. 75–100.

[43]Sperling and Webber, 'The European Union', p. 247; Jeff Huysmans, 'The European Union and the securitization of migration', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38:5 (2000), pp. 751–77; Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization'.

[44]Lucarelli, 'The EU as a securitising agent'.

[45]Mark Salter, 'When securitization fails: The hard case of counter-terrorism programs', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 116–31 (p. 116).

[46]See for example Matt McDonald, 'The failed securitization of climate change in Australia', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47:4 (2012), pp. 579–92; Salter, 'When securitization fails'.

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speaks of 'case selection bias' in securitisation studies that 'privilege[s] successful cases (and hence outcomes in general) [and] leads to a rather impoverished understanding of failed processes of securitization'.[47] According to Mark Salter, this is because the 'Copenhagen School (CS) interprets all successful securitizing moves as a failure of normal politics'.[48] In the original formulation of the securitisation framework, securitising moves can fail because of faults in the grammatical structure of the securitising move, the inherent characteristics of the issue, or a rejection by the audience.[49] Additionally, proponents of the broader sociological approach to the securitisation framework argue that to assess the success or failure of securitisation one needs to take into account certain conditions (e.g. political, historical, material) that further impact the construct of (in)securitisation moves.[50] As noted by Salter,[51] securitisation is a sociological and political process that manifests in language, but also in the complex effect of power, interest, intersubjectivity, bureaucratic position, and processes. In this view, the sociological approach to studying securitisation helps us to explain the failure of securitisation and therefore further advances our knowledge of the processes of security construction viewed as a causal process rather than viewing it merely through actors' pronouncements.[52]

Methods

To analyse the process of (in)securitisation of the transnational repression issue and to increase confidence in the findings, I rely on multiple data sources. These consist of: (1) selected text readings, (2) observations and informal discussions, (3) interview analysis, and (4) descriptive statistics. This analysis was further complemented by secondary sources and relevant literature. Such a research strategy was adopted to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the research question under investigation and to enhance the rigour of the research study overall.

Discourse analysis was performed on a range of official documents produced by the European Parliament and the European Commission as well as official statements delivered by the Union's representatives on the topic of transnational repression. This analysis helped to identify themes associated with transnational repression and trace whether or not policy responses have been adopted. Discourse analysis provides an appropriate method of analysis to explore the relationship between language and policy in the securitisation process and the representation of the threat image put into circulation by security actors as well as to consider the wider implications of the policy discourse.[53] In this process, questions from the European Parliament Plenary Database were also used for examining questions raised on topics pertaining to transnational repression. Data was further collected from the online workshop organised by Human Rights Watch in 2024 in which the researcher took part. Additionally, observations and informal discussions on transnational repression with EU official policy representatives were collected during the 'Global State of Human Rights Conference' on 24–5 May 2024 in Venice. The paper further draws on 12 semi-structured interviews conducted online and in Brussels with EU policymakers, civil society organisations, and political exiles. Interview methods followed a snowball strategy. The interviews took place between July and October 2023 in Brussels and online. The conclusions were reached based on data saturation. Given the sensitivity of the topic and to facilitate conversations, the researcher

[47] Jan Ruzicka, 'Failed securitization: Why it matters', *Polity*, 51:2 (2019), pp. 365–77 (p. 373).

[48] Salter, 'When securitization fails', p. 116.

[49] Buzan et al., *Security*; Ole Waever, 'The EU as a security actor', in Morten Kelstrup and Michael C. Williams (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 250–94 (p. 252).

[50] McDonald, 'The failed securitization of climate change in Australia'; Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'; Jeff Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[51] Salter, 'When securitization fails', p. 117.

[52] Ruzicka, 'Failed securitization'.

[53] See Christopher Baker-Beall, *The European Union's Fight against Terrorism: Discourse, Policies, Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Balzacq, 'A theory of securitization.

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offered the option of full anonymity to all interviewees. Questions were focused on EU institutional responses to the transnational repression phenomenon, current policies, and tools available to fight such forms of authoritarian interference, and the implications of transnational repression attacks on European democracies. To examine interview data, the researcher relied on thematic analysis to inductively identify themes and patterns that emerged on the topic of transnational repression. Patterns and practices associated with the theme 'transnational repression' were thematically clustered to interpret specific dimensions and themes addressing the research question under investigation. This led to the production of a thematic framework categorising participants' responses as follows: (1) interpretation of transnational repression, (2) political mobilisation on transnational repression, (3) policy responses. These themes were then used to structure the presentation and analysis of the findings below. Additionally, the study further relies on the Freedom House Database on Transnational Repression (version 2023) and uses descriptive statistics to demonstrate transnational repression incidents in the EU.

Securitising moves on transnational repression

As argued by Floyd, securitising actors 'do not exist in a political vacuum; rather they are influenced by a variety of actors, including political advisors, opposition politicians, public intellectuals, newspaper editors, and ordinary people'.[54] According to Floyd, these 'securitizing requesters' are actors who seek to influence the initiation of the securitisation process and persuade others to securitise an issue.[55] In a similar way, Diez and colleagues[56] discuss the significance of 'discursive entrepreneurs', individually or collectively, in conducting securitising moves, whereby they pave the way for the legitimate securitisation of an issue, setting a new 'norm' for policy agendas. In the present study, we can identify several securitising setters who have paved the way for the securitisation of transnational repression in EU institutional fora.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, a handful of academic scholars scattered across the disciplines of political science in Europe and in the United States looked at a new way to make sense of evolving trends in authoritarian states and their engagement with their populations across borders. Increasingly, as they note, authoritarian engagement with their populations abroad carried a repressive character.[57] In this sense, although the phenomenon of transnational repression is not new, it gained new momentum with the renewal of authoritarian politics globally.

At the same time, this intellectual effort drew the attention of civil society actors such as Freedom House, who similarly observed a rising trend in authoritarian transnational repression practices.[58] The joint mobilisation of Freedom House with academics, practitioners, and policymakers around the topic generated a series of round-table discussions and debates around transnational repression. In 2018, in the aftermath of the killing of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, transnational repression gained new momentum. The event represented a critical point in generating new paths of institutional development towards securitisation of the issue in the United States. The Biden administration made transnational repression one of the key priorities across agencies, with attention given by the National Security Council.[59] Transnational repression became a key component

[54]Rita Floyd, 'Parallels with the hate speech debate: The pros and cons of criminalising harmful securitising requests', *Review of International Studies*, 44:1 (2018), pp. 43–63 (p. 45).

[55]Floyd, 'Parallels with the hate speech debate'.

[56]Diez et al., *The Securitisation of Climate Change*.

[57]See Moss, 'Transnational repression, diaspora mobilization, and the case of the Arab Spring'; Emanuela Dalmasso, Adele Sordi, Marlies Glasius, et al., 'Intervention: Extraterritorial authoritarian power', *Political Geography*, 64 (2017), pp. 95–104; Michaelsen, 'Exit and voice in a digital age'.

[58]See for example Freedom House, 'Still not safe: Transnational repression in 2022' (2022), available at: {https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/FH_TransnationalRepression2023_0.pdf} [Accessed: 23 Oct.2024]. Freedom House, 'Out of sight, not out of reach' (2022), available at: {https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Complete_FH_TransnationalRepressionReport2021_rev020221.pdf}.

[59]Freedom House, 'Unsafe in America: Transnational repression in the United States' (2022), available at: {https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/united-states}.

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of US foreign policy diplomacy. From 2021, the Biden–Harris administration, in the words of Uzra Zeya, secretary of state for civilian security, democracy, and human rights in the Biden administration, made 'combating transnational repression a global human rights priority' and urged its allies to join its efforts to 'drive a global response' to it.[60]

US attempts to externalise its concerns about transnational repression spilled across international organisations, such as the UN,[61] and other informal intergovernmental fora such as the G7. The United States played an influential role in the establishment of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Working Group on Transnational Repression[62] and has helped coordinate emergency responses with partners when individuals have been targeted for transnational repression abroad.[63] Several interviews mentioned that the United States is actively promoting a security narrative on transnational repression on an international level. The aim is to drive a policy diffusion on the topic, as explained by an EU officer: 'the more we talk about the topic, the more states in the EU will become socialised and will see [transnational repression] as a salient issue to be addressed'.[64]

This international narrative about transnational repression as a security concern has thus started to pervade the European context. Events and media reports on high-profile cases, such as the diversion of the Ryanair flight carrying the Belarusian activist and blogger Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend in 2021 or the discovery of unofficial police stations by Safeguard Defenders in 2022, have contributed to increasing the visibility of the issue in the EU. Additionally, the mobilisation of individual diaspora actors and the civil society sector on the topic[65] further shaped debates and raised the visibility of transnational repression within EU fora. The ability of human rights organisations to collect, disseminate, mobilise, and frame information about transnational repression as a human rights and a security issue played a significant role in attracting the attention of some of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). In this view, transnational repression has been further championed by individual MEPs who took part in the joint events organised by these advocacy actors. For example, in 2024, the Human Rights Watch branch in Europe held its first joint session on the topic with Hannah Neumann MEP (Greens, Germany), academics, and exiles after the release of their influential report on transnational repression in Europe, '"We will find you": A global look at how governments repress nationals abroad'.[66] It portrayed transnational repression as a security threat affecting human rights and destabilising democracies in Europe.

Alongside these efforts, independent organisations in Europe such as the Council of Europe – the European benchmark for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law – played an important role in further increasing the political awareness on the topic. In his report 'Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights' submitted to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in June 2023, Sir Andrew Chopes notes that 'the number and gravity of acts of transnational repression committed in Europe, including on the territory of some member States, are a matter of concern'. He further observes that acts of transnational repression 'not only violate numerous individual human rights but are also a threat to the rule of law and democracy and undermine the values of the Council of Europe'.[67] Chopes's report further urged

[60] US State Department, 'Under Secretary Zeya's remarks at a Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) hearing on China's global transnational repression campaign, September, 12, 2023 (2023), available at: {https://2021-2025.state.gov/under-secretary-zeyas-remarks-at-a-cecc-hearing-on-chinas-global-transnational-repression-campaign/}.

[61] See for example US Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, 'Joint statement on transnational repression as delivered by Ambassador Michèle Taylor, June 26, 2024' (2024), available at: {https://geneva.usmission.gov/2024/06/26/joint-statement-on-transnational-repression/}.

[62] See US State Department, 'Under Secretary Zeya's remarks'.

[63] The group aims to create an information-sharing platform about TNR and best practices. Author's informal discussions with EU and NGO representatives.

[64] Author's informal discussion with EU policy officer, Human Rights division.

[65] Particularly from Safeguard Defenders, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.

[66] See event recording: Transnational repression: a threat to human rights in Europe, 16 April 2024. Zoom event. Available at: {https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_YVlV1_q-k&ab_channel=HRWLivestream}.

[67] PACE, 'Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights', p. 1.

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the Council of Europe, its members, and observer States to recognise that 'transnational repression is a global phenomenon attacking the foundations of democratic societies and the rule of law' and asked them to adopt stronger and more co-ordinated actions to prevent and fight transnational repression.[68]

In this context, transnational repression has entered the EU internal institutional fora. References to transnational repression in the EU can be found in the activities of the European Parliament and its specialised committees, such as the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes in the EU, Including Disinformation (INGE1 and ING2) and the PEGA Committee. The Special Committee on Foreign Interference was set up in June 2020, with the task of combating meddling by third countries in the democratic processes of EU member states. It was created as a result of tensions between Europe, Russia, and China.[69] The final report was adopted in plenary on 9 March 2022 by an overwhelming majority. The report maps the threat of foreign interference: disinformation, manipulation of social media platforms and advertising systems, cyberattacks, threats against and the harassment of journalists, covert political funding, and elite capture and co-optation.[70] The report notes that 'malicious foreign actors' such as Russia, China, and Iran use information manipulation and other tactics to interfere in democratic processes and aim to weaken the democratic governance of the targeted countries.[71] The report further acknowledges that foreign interference presents a threat to European security and affects fundamental freedoms as well as democracy and the rule of law. The second report (ING2) follows a similar line of argument, with the added mandate to address issues of transparency, integrity, and accountability within the European Parliament in relation to the alleged attempts by Qatar and Morocco to influence Members, former Members, and staff of the European Parliament.[72]

Despite a strong focus on election interference, disinformation campaigns, media manipulation, and cyberattacks on EU critical infrastructure, both reports raise the issue of transnational repression and highlight different transnational repression strategies used by authoritarian states to target journalists, human rights activists, academics, government officials, and politicians.[73] The reports further recommend the EU and its Member States co-ordinate a strategy on interference and develop cross-sectoral targeted sanctions mechanisms including diplomatic sanctions, travel bans, asset freezes, and the stripping of EU residence permits from foreign individuals and their family members associated with foreign interference attempts.[74]

In a similar vein, the PEGA Committee report,[75] which investigates infringements and maladministration in the application of EU law about use of Pegasus and equivalent spyware, makes annotations regarding transnational repression. The report, written by Dutch MEP Sophie in't Veld

[68]PACE, 'Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights', p. 4.

[69]Oliver Costa, 'The European Parliament and the Qatargate', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 62, annual review (2024), pp. 76–87.

[70]See European Parliament, 'INGE 1 Report: Resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (2020/2268[INI])' (2022), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0064_EN.pdf}.

[71]European Parliament, 'INGE 1 Report'.

[72]European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question, E-003825/2022 (ASW): Joint answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell i Fontelles on behalf of the European Commission (2023), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-003825-ASW_EN.html}.

[73]European Parliament, 'INGE 1 Report', pp. 37–8; European Parliament, 'ING 2. Report. P9_TA(2023)0219 Foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation European Parliament resolution of 1 June 2023 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (2022/2075[INI]) (2023), p. 37, available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0219_EN.pdf}.

[74]See European Parliament, 'INGE 1 Report'; European Parliament, 'Report of the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law in relation to the use of Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware (2022/2077[INI])' (2023), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/PEGA/DV/2023/05-08/REPORTcompromises_EN.pdf}.

[75]European Parliament, 'Report of the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law'.

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(Renew Europe) describes how the governments of Morocco and Rwanda targeted with spyware high-profile Union citizens, including the political exiles and critics of the regime.[76] It further highlights the vulnerability of individuals targeted by online cyber threats in Europe.

Transnational repression has been further raised in various parliamentary resolutions. In 2022, the European Parliament adopted a recommendation regarding the negotiation of a cooperation agreement between the EU and Interpol, highlighting that the abuse of Interpol by authoritarian regimes to target critics abroad constitutes a 'threat to the integrity of the EU's cooperation with Interpol'.[77]

In March 2023, the European Parliament report on the EU guidelines on human rights defenders (HRDs) (2021/2204[INI]), written by the German rapporteur, Hannan Neumann (Verts/Ale), called on the Commission to tackle the increasing phenomenon of transnational threats against HRDs and on Member States to facilitate reporting, investigations, and attribution of these transnational attacks. It explicitly asked the Commission to investigate cases of unlawful foreign interference that persecute human rights advocates in EU Member States.[78] The resolution further called for the Commission and Member States to 'to identify and tackle these threats within the EU as a priority'.[79]

Furthermore, following China's crackdown on human rights activists and the systematic repression of people of Uyghur ethnicity, notably in the Xinjiang region, the resolution on the 'Chinese Government crackdown on the peaceful protests across the People's Republic of China' (2022/2992[RSP]) called on the Commission and its Member States to 'identify and close down any avenues facilitating China's campaigns of transnational repression, in particular against members of its diaspora'.[80] The resolution further urged the introduction of sanctions against those responsible for crimes against humanity and better co-ordination regarding Chinese overseas police service stations.

More recently, the resolution on Iran's unprecedented attack against Israel, the need for de-escalation and an EU response (RC-B9-0235/2024), adopted in April 2024, called for the European Commission to launch 'a broad strategy to address transnational repression by the Iranian regime in the EU' and take measures to 'prevent any harassment or intimidation of the Iranian diaspora in the EU, including on campuses'.[81]

As noted by Maurer, 'initiative reports and resolutions reflect MEPs awareness and interests in raising an issue with the public, with the Council and the Commission'.[82] In this view, the European Parliament (EP) constitutes an important arena where policy concepts are discussed and put forward, contributing to the formulation phase. Among the EU core institutions, the

[76]European Parliament, 'Report of the investigation of alleged contraventions and maladministration in the application of Union law'.

[77]See European Parliament, 'Report on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council and the Commission on the negotiations for a cooperation agreement between the European Union and the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL) (2022/2025[INI])' (2022), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0200_EN.html}.

[78]European Parliament, 'The EU guidelines on human rights defenders: European Parliament resolution of 16 March 2023 on the EU guidelines on human rights defenders (2021/2204[INI])' para. 40 (2023), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0086_EN.pdf}.

[79]European Parliament, 'The EU guidelines on human rights defenders', para. 39.

[80]European Parliament, 'Resolution on the Chinese Government crackdown on the peaceful protests across the People's Republic of China (2022/2992[RSP])' (2022), para. 18, available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0445_EN.html}.

[81]European Parliament, 'Iran's unprecedented attack against Israel, the need for de-escalation and an EU response (P9_TA[2024]0382)' (2024), para. 17, available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0382_EN.html}.

[82]Andreas Peter Mauer, 'The legislative powers and impact of the European Parliament', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 41(2) (2003), pp. 227–47 (p. 238).

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EP positions itself as a defender and protector of human rights within and beyond the EU.[83] The EP's strength within the EU political system comes from the fact that it is the only directly elected institution. Accordingly, given that the electoral connection is stronger regarding global issues, parliamentarians often have greater incentives to put foreign policy issues on the agenda.[84] During international conflicts such as the Arab Spring, for instance, studies show how MEPs often used arguments about their special position as an institution representing citizens.[85] In this realm, the EP has been particularly active in holding debates or passing resolutions on human rights issues. At the national level, as noted by Szép, members of parliaments (MPs), whose political survival depends on the electorate, also have incentives to put human rights issues on the agenda, given that in some Member States the electorate and civil society have high standards and expectations in these policy domains.[86] Krotky also notes that MEPs are agents of two principals – their national party and their European political group – and often favour their national party position on sensitive topics.[87] In this view, individual MEPs have contributed to debates on nurturing the issue of transnational repression through parliamentary questions or resolutions. In 2024, MEPs explicitly tabled a question on 'transnational repression' for the first time.[88]

As we can see from the above analysis, transnational repression has entered EU agenda-setting and has been channelled by the EP, which has initiated a securitising narrative on the topic. The aim is to convince Member States, the Commission, and the Council of the social and collective threats posed by transnational repression and the need for extraordinary measures. However, despite calls from the Parliament to securitise transnational repression in the EU, the analysis below demonstrates that there have been no efforts to do so in the face of what was articulated as a common threat to the Union and its democracy. As argued by securitisation scholars, securitisation is an 'explicitly political choice and act'.[89] This implies that securitisation depends on political factors which require political mobilisation.[90] What are then the political factors that affect a wider securitising move on transnational repression?

Conditions explaining the failure to securitise transnational repression in the EU

Extraordinary measures?

In its February 2023 Conclusions, the Foreign Affairs Council stressed that the EU would 'pay special attention to … transnational repression'.[91] Although a reference was made to transnational repression, beyond such declarations, no emergency or policy measures have been taken to respond

[83] Laura Feliu and Francesc Serra, 'The European Union as a "normative power" and the normative voice of the European Parliament', in Stelios Stavridis and Daniela Irrera (eds), *The European Parliament and Its International Relations* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 17–34; Lachlan McKenzie and Katharina Meissner, 'Human rights conditionality in European Union trade negotiations: The case of the EU–Singapore FTA', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55:4 (2017), pp. 832–49.

[84] Viktor Szép, 'Transnational parliamentary activities in EU foreign policy: The role of parliamentarians in the establishment of the EU's global human rights sanctions regime', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60:6 (2022), pp. 1741–57 (p. 1752).

[85] Michael Reinprecht and Henrietta Levin, 'Democratization through public diplomacy: An analysis of the European Parliament's reaction to the Arab Spring', CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy (2015), Paper 6, available at: {https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/useruploads/u33041/Democratization%20through%20PD.pdf}.

[86] Szép, 'Transnational parliamentary activities in EU foreign policy', p. 1743.

[87] Jan Krotký, 'Debating irregular migration in the European Parliament: A "parliament without a public" or the voice of the people?', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 31:3 (2023), pp. 874–88.

[88] See European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question E-000459/2024(ASW): Answer given by High Representative/Vice-President Borrell i Fontelles on behalf of the European Commission' (2024), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2024-000459-ASW_EN.html}.

[89] Ole Wæver, 'The EU as a security actor', in Morten Kelstrup and Michael C. Williams (eds), International Relations Theory and the Politics of European Integration: Power, Security and Community (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 250–94 (p. 252).

[90] B. Guy Peters and Mauric Falk Van Nispen, *Public Policy Instruments* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998), p. 552.

[91] The Foreign Affairs Council represents a configuration of the Council of the European Union.

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to it. As shown in earlier sections, securitisation implies a shift from a 'normal' political process into an 'emergency mode' generating the adoption of specific policy measures.[92]

At present, the EU's efforts to tackle transnational repression, as stated by the High Representative/Vice-President Borrell i Fontelles on behalf of the European Commission, are addressed via multilateral platforms and human rights dialogues, as well as through various EU instruments such as the emergency fund, Protectdefenders.eu, which is addressed to HRDs at risk, including HRDs in exile subject to transnational repression. It also coordinates its approaches with 'like-minded partners'.[93] The Commission's recommendations on the Defence of Democracy Package further acknowledge that 'surveillance and spyware tools should not interfere with the democratic debate, notably by targeting political actors and journalists'.[94]

It becomes clear from the above observations that the Council and the Commission have acknowledged the thematic issue of transnational repression without invoking extraordinary measures. It further becomes evident that responses to transnational repression at the EU level have been very limited at best and have been mainly addressed through diplomatic and multilateral frameworks within the EU external actions. In this sense, transnational repression is largely treated in the domain of external threats. Indeed, interviews conducted in Brussels for this article further show that transnational repression is embedded within different agencies of the European External Action Service (EEAS). Discussions with policy officers from the Directorates-General for Human Rights, Defence Industry and Space (DEFIS), and the Hybrid Threat Unit all acknowledge transnational repression as part of their workflows. However, as the interviews revealed, because of its broad indeterminate framing and the fact that transnational repression is not in itself a defined policy area, the topic has become a playing field among these different entities. Experts in these entities generate their own meaning and interpretations of transnational repression.[95]

Additionally, there has been little policy discussion on the topic. Although the EU has not yet defined transnational repression, interviews with policy officers and the review of EU policy documents reveal a common understanding of how the EU conceptualises transnational repression. In the current context, transnational repression has been largely viewed and aggregated with a range of hybrid threat concerns but has been rarely mentioned, if defined at all.[96] The European official communication issued by the Commission and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats defines hybrid threats as 'unacceptable foreign interference in sovereign states' internal affairs and space'.[97] The EU's policies to counter hybrid threats are outlined in two major documents: the 2016 'Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats' and the 2018 'Joint Communication on increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats'.[98] In these communications, the EU identifies hybrid threat activities carried out by state and non-state actors as being a 'serious and acute threat' to the Union and its Member States. The communications further outline actions to build resilience in areas such as cybersecurity, critical infrastructure, protecting the financial system from illicit use, and efforts to counter

[92]Buzan et al., *Security*.

[93]See European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question E-000459/2024(ASW)'.

[94]Official Journal of the European Union, 'Commission Recommendation (EU) 2023/2829 of 12 December 2023: On inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament' (2023), para. 16, available at: {https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202302829}.

[95]Interviews 11, 6.

[96]This observation was also reflected in the interviews.

[97]Georgios Giannopoulos, Hanna Smith, and Marianthi Theocharidou, *The Landscape of Hybrid Threats: A Conceptual Model* (Ispra: European Commission, 2020), PUBSY No. 123305, p. 9, available at: {https://euhybnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Conceptual-Framework-Hybrid-Threats-HCoE-JRC.pdf}.

[98]European Commission, 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Joint framework on countering hybrid threats. A European Union response' (2016), available at: {https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0018}; European Commission, 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council: Increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats' (2018), available at: {https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018JC0016}.

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violent extremism and radicalisation. In 2018, the EU issued a new communication on the threat of disinformation and foreign information manipulation.[99] The articulation of hybrid threat and disinformation as a threat to the Union's collective security and its citizens has been further emphasised in the EU's new strategic agenda for 2019–24: 'we must protect our societies from malicious cyber activities, hybrid threats and disinformation originating from hostile states and non-state actors'.[100] Perhaps more authoritatively, the EU Security Strategy further stresses the building of EU resilience and mainstreaming hybrid considerations into broader policy-making.[101] Such concerns have been further reflected in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence document, which sets out the EU's security and defence ambitions for the next 10 years. In this document, the EU further acknowledges its role as a security provider and the need to build collective resilience against hybrid threats: 'threats we face around the world are intensifying and the capacity of individual Member States to cope is insufficient and declining'.[102]

There is thus a clearly articulated sense of 'vulnerability' to hybrid threats from authoritarian states, and unless the EU enhances its resilience and its ability to counter hybrid threats, such threats will risk undermining the Union's security order and the safety of its citizens, society, and institutions. Yet, despite such claims, current policy formulations lack reference to transnational repression. The emphasis on the Union's policy work on hybrid threats is largely centred on issues related to increasing situational awareness, cybersecurity, election manipulation, and disinformation campaigns against the EU's critical infrastructure and democratic processes. There has been little effort and discussion to problematise transnational repression as a prime challenge to individual security and its ramifications for societal and political referent objects. None of the above-mentioned policy documents make explicit reference to transnational repression or make efforts to distinguish it from other forms of hybrid threats. Indeed, when efforts have been made to bring the issue of transnational repression onto the EU agenda through questions for written answer, they have received responses from the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission (Josep Borrell i Fontelles) stating that the EU had no competence in this area but recognised that hybrid threats, including information manipulation and foreign interference, are a challenge to the EU's security.[103] We can therefore further argue that the current understanding of the EU on transnational repression relates to the idea that the threat of transnational repression is external and part of a 'basket of threats' belonging to the category of hybrid threats.

Securitising power and audience acceptance?

As we can observe, there is an awareness of transnational repression among the EU institutions, but this process does not mean the acceptance of transnational repression as a security threat by the EU's key decision-makers. From the European Commission's perspective, transnational repression is viewed as a localised issue within national borders, which in most instances does not pose a significant threat to the security of the Union and its Member States. The official written answer on Chinese illegal police station incidents in Europe, provided by the European Commission and the

[99]See European Commission, 'Joint communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action plan against disinformation' (2018), available at: {https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018JC0036}.

[100]European Council, 'A new strategic agenda 2019–2024' (2019), available at: {https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/#:~:text=We%20must%20protect%20our%20societies,resources%20and%20more%20technological%20capacities}.

[101]European Commission, 'EU Security Union strategy: connecting the dots in a new security ecosystem' (2020), available at: {https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1379}.

[102]Council of the European Union, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence' (2022), p. 7, available at: {https://www.satcen.europa.eu/keydocuments/strategic_compass_en3_web6298d4e4601f2a0001c0f871.pdf}.

[103]See, for example, the European Parliament question and answer for written answer E-003825/2022. European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question, E-003825/2022(ASW)'; European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question, E-003825/2022(ASW) (2022), available at: {https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-003825-ASW_EN.html}.

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High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security (who also presides over the Foreign Affairs Council), clearly illustrates this position:

> Member States, which are responsible for the maintenance of law and order and for safeguarding internal security on their own soil, are entitled to investigate any alleged violation of their laws or transgression of their competences in internal security occurring on their territory, and any violation of human rights.[104]

In this sense, the EU's resilience agenda to counter transnational repression from authoritarian states is based on the assumption that Member States are central actors in resilience building against such forms of authoritarian interference. Such an understanding implies that transnational repression is subject to national assessment and response. However, at the national level, there has been little interest from Member states in addressing transnational repression. Although some European countries have demonstrated some awareness – the signing of the Declaration of Principles to Combat Transnational Repression[105] which includes Germany, the Baltic states, and Slovakia, is an illustrative example – overall, however, Member States have refrained from taking actions and initiating a securitisation response. Interviews with different EU stakeholders reveal an apparent lack of interest among the Member States on transnational repression issues.[106] Several interviews mentioned that transnational repression is not on the radar of most Member States' representatives, which in turn reflects a low level of visibility on transnational repression at EU institutional levels.[107] As a civil society officer explains: 'we brief Member States and EU institutions like the Commission, they listen to our reports and observations, but without further interest'.[108]

In this view, as argued by scholars of securitisation, for a securitisation move to be successful the audience must accept the securitisng actor's claims and be convinced that the issue poses an 'existential threat'.[109] Securitisation is ultimately a process of shared agreement or attitudes.[110] As noted by Balzacq[111] and Léonard and Kaunert,[112] audiences often possess differential powers and influence, leading to differing effects on securitisation outcomes. They are defined by the connection to the legitimisation and authorisation of security speech,[113] by their position within different phases or 'settings' of securitisation processes,[114] or by their potential to authorise security action.[115] In the present EU context, the issue of transnational repression fails to resonate among its Member States, the European Commission, and the Council, who appear to be unwilling to securitise transnational repression and have expressed no sense of urgency in tackling the issue. Therefore, in the absence of common views and threat resonance, the issue of TR fails to find salience. Furthermore, one should also consider the capacity of actor(s) to securitise an issue, as an actor 'needs sufficient institutional

[104] European Parliament, 'Parliamentary question, E-003825/2022(ASW)'.

[105] Freedom House, 'Declaration of principles to combat transnational repression' (2023), available at: https://freedomhouse.org/2023/summit-for-democracy-transnational-repression; European Parliament, Parliamentary answer, E-003825/2022(ASW).

[106] Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8.

[107] Interviews 1, 2, 3,4, 6, 7, 8.

[108] Interview 2

[109] Balzacq et al., '"Securitization" revisited'; Buzan et al., *Security*.

[110] Andrew Neal, 'Securitization and risk at the EU border: The origins of FRONTEX', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47:2 (2009), pp. 333–56.

[111] Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'.

[112] Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert, 'Reconceptualising the relationship between the audience and the securitizing actor', in Thierry Balzacq (ed.), *Securitization Theory: How Security Problems Emerge and Dissolve* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 71–90.

[113] Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'.

[114] Léonard and Kaunert. 'Reconceptualising the relationship between the audience and the securitizing actor'; Salter, 'Securitization and desecuritization'.

[115] Paul Roe, 'Actor, audience(s) and emergency measures: Securitization and the UK's decision to invade Iraq', *Security Dialogue*, 39:6 (2008), pp. 615–35.

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and political authority for their statements to contribute to the shaping of political and social relations'.[116] In this view, further consideration should be given to power relations between securitising actors and audiences. From this perspective, despite the Parliament's calls to act against authoritarian transnational repression, its institutional power in decision-making is limited. The European Parliament's resolutions have no binding effect, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU Member States or other EU institutions, such as the Commission or the Council, which have a greater influence on EU policy.

Political environment and threat perception

The challenge to securitising transnational repression can be further explained by the political environment of the EU and security threat perception. First, the EU is a regional institution encapsulating a range of individual nation-states with different cultures, norms, and interests. Such diversity poses a challenge to the strategic formulation of common threat perception. The current EU post–Cold War security environment has been subject to new security threats such as terrorism, migration, territorial conflicts in the EU neighbourhood, and energy security, among others. In the midst of such tensions, giving attention to transnational repression, viewed as isolated sub-state violence, may be a luxury that EU institutions and some Member States cannot afford.[117] Looking at the Freedom House database, only 82 out of 854 incidents recorded in the world between 2014 and 2023 take place in the EU; this means that only 10 per cent of incidents of transnational repression are happening on EU soil. This signals a relatively low level of incidents in comparison to other regions in the world. As suggested by Michaelsen and Ruijgrok,[118] authoritarian states engaging in transnational repression find it more difficult to conduct direct cross-border attacks in democracies due to the established rules and laws that democracies provide.[119] Given the low level of incidents, one might assume that transnational repression is not considered in the domain of immediate threat and is rather viewed as a distant threat. As argued by the scholars of securitisation, frequency of activities and severity of outcomes have an impact on whether an issue is framed as a threat or acquires a societal salience.[120] Buzan and colleagues further contend that the success of securitising moves requires that features of the alleged threat must be 'generally held to be threatening'.[121] In relation to collective securitisation, Lucarelli also notes that the perception of a common threat frequently leads to enhanced cooperation (or at least coordination).[122] In her words, 'when the security stake is perceived to be high, multilateral security governance is enhanced'.[123] In the current context, transnational repression is not viewed as a threat to the Union and its Member States but rather is treated as an isolated diplomatic incident, and not as a unified pattern or a phenomenon that requires emergency measures.[124] Additionally, the phenomenon of transnational repression within the EU context is perceived as a relatively new security issue.[125] As an EU policy officer observes: 'we are aware of transnational repression and its implications on human rights and democracy, however, in the past such incidents were mostly situated outside the EU. It is only recently that we have encountered instances of transnational repression within the EU

[116]Neal, 'Securitization and risk at the EU border', pp. 333–56, p. 335.

[117]Interviews 2, 6, 11.

[118]Michaelsen and Ruijgrok, 'Autocracy's long reach'.

[119]Yet, despite these challenges, democracies are not invulnerable to direct transnational attacks. As their study demonstrates, the number of direct physical attacks is higher in democracies that in authoritarian regimes, in particular when authoritarian states cannot rely on a host state's cooperation for deportation or an extradition request for targeted individuals.

[120]Eriksson, *Threat Politics*.

[121]Buzan et al., *Security*.

[122]Lucarelli. 'The EU as a securitising agent?'.

[123]Lucarelli, 'The EU as a securitising agent?', p. 420.

[124]Interviews 2, 6, 11.

[125]Note: transnational repression is not a new phenomenon; historically, authoritarian states have persecuted states in Europe.

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context.'[126] As argued by Balzacq,[127] the success of a securitisation move is contingent upon a perceptive environment and rests with whether the historical conjuncture renders the audience more sensitive to the vulnerability of a given issue.[128] This point has been also raised by Barry Buzan, who notes that 'threats that are specific, close in time and space, and amplified by historical circumstances, are more likely to become security issues than threats that are diffuse, distant in time and space, and historically neutral'.[129] In the current European context, transnational repression incidents are perceived as low-intensity threats, and given their low level of incidence, Members States do not appear to be much concerned.

Second, transnational repression can be perceived as a sensitive political issue for the EU and its Member States, which may share strategic partnerships with authoritarian perpetrator states. Here, the prioritisation of economic and broader geopolitical interests and the desire to avoid political conflict with strategic partners means that the EU and its Member States may turn an 'a blind eye' on incidents related to transnational repression and prioritise strategic interests over normative human rights dimensions.[130] In this respect, geopolitical dynamics and strategic interdependencies condition the (in)securitisation of transnational repression. The accession of Sweden to NATO illustrates this point. In 2022, when Sweden asked to join NATO after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Turkey withheld its approval amid a row over what it called Sweden's support to Kurdish separatists and the country being a refuge for political refugees who took part in the 2016 alleged coup attempt in Turkey.[131] Turkey also demanded that they lift the arms embargo imposed as a result of the former's military operations in Iraq and Syria. After a long negotiation process (leading to a 20-month delay), Turkey was able to extract some concessions which led to the accession of Sweden to NATO membership.[132] In response to Turkey's demands, Sweden introduced tougher anti-terrorism laws, making it illegal to give financial or logistical help to banned groups classified as 'terrorists'.[133] An estimated 50,000–100,000 Kurds, including people from Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, live in Sweden.[134] Shortly after the NATO agreement, some Kurdish charities closed their bank accounts. Kurdish people living in Sweden were also subjected to surveillance by Säpo, the Swedish security police.[135] A Swedish court jailed a Kurdish man for crimes including attempting to finance terrorism and told him he would be deported upon release.[136]

Additionally, bilateral relations between the host state and the authoritarian perpetrator state can further explain Member States' reticence to securitise transnational repression. Recent studies examining the geopolitics of transnational repression demonstrate how trade leverages and geopolitical ties, among other factors such as geographical proximity and weak rule of law, facilitate transnational repression in host countries.[137] As Figure 1 illustrates, a significant number of individuals residing in the EU were faced with physical violence, including assault (15%) and

[126] Interview 3.

[127] Balzacq, 'The three faces of securitization'.

[128] Ibid., p. 182.

[129] Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 134.

[130] Interviews 1, 2, 4.

[131] 'Sweden hails historic step as Turkey backs Nato bid', BBC (11 July 2023), available at: {https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66162513}.

[132] 'Turkey parliament backs Sweden's Nato membership', BBC (23 January 2024), available at: {https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68076829}.

[133] 'Sweden hails historic step as Turkey backs Nato bid'.

[134] '"Now we are not safe": Sweden's Kurds fear Nato deal has sold them out'. *The Guardian* (7 February 2024), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/07/now-we-are-not-safe-swedens-kurds-fear-nato-deal-has-sold-them-out}.

[135] '"Now we are not safe"'.

[136] 'Sweden jails Kurd for financing terrorism after Turkey calls for crackdown', BBC (23 January 2024), available at: {https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66119743}.

[137] See Michaelsen and Ruijgrok, 'Autocracy's long reach'; Cordell and Medhi, 'Transnational repression'; Roman-Gabriel Olar, 'Do they know something we don't? Diffusion of repression in authoritarian regimes', *Journal of Peace Research*, 56:5 (2019), pp. 667–81 (pp. 667–8).

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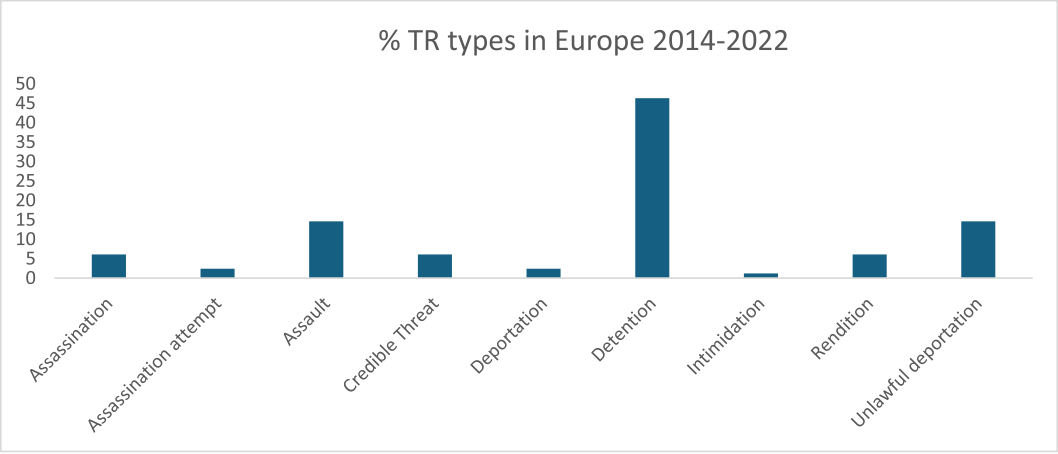

Figure 1. Percentage of types of transnational repression incidents in Europe.
Source: Freedom House, Transnational Repression Database, version 4, last updated 18 January 2023.

assassination attempts (2.5%) as well as assassination (6%).[138] A large proportion of them have also experienced detention (46%). Additionally, an increasing number of individuals have also been unlawfully deported (15%) or have been subject to rendition (6%).

The observations related to 'detentions', 'deportations', and 'renditions' demonstrate that some European states are complicit in perpetuating transnational repression incidents. This can be illustrated with the case of Turkey and Bulgaria. In addition to the geographical proximity, the two countries share important bilateral economic relations, particularly in the sectors of energy, trade, and tourism. Turkey is among Bulgaria's the top five trade partners, representing an 8 per cent trade share in the overall foreign trade of the country.[139] Following the failed military coup in 2016, Turkey launched a witch hunt against Muhammed Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement but also against leftists and any critics of the regime. Just one month after the coup, at the request of Turkish authorities, Bulgaria extradited Gulenist businessman Abdullah Büyük, who had sought political asylum in Bulgaria.[140] The extradition came into force even though the City Court of Sofia and the Court of Appeal refused extradition over the lack of guarantee of a fair trial. This event further demonstrates that, despite adopting legal and institutional reforms associated with EU membership, Bulgaria's judicial system is still prone to politicisation.[141] In total, the Freedom House database shows that out of seven incidents recorded in Bulgaria, six originated in Turkey, with incidents ranging from detention to deportation and rendition (see Figure 2). Turkey is also ranked as the second main perpetrator of transnational repression incidents in Europe after Russia (see Figure 3).

What actions could the EU take in response to the threat of transnational repression?

As seen earlier, securitisation of an issue derives from the language discourse and from the different capacities of various actors to engage in speech acts. As demonstrated in this study, although the

[138]The author distinguishes between assassination attempts and assassination; Freedom House aggregates these data.

[139]Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Relations between Türkiye and Bulgaria' (2022),available at: {https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-bulgaria.en.mfa#:~:text=T%C3%BCrkiye%20is%20among%20the%20top,to%202%2C5%20billion%20Dollars}.

[140]Georgi Govev, 'Bulgarians outraged by deportation of Gülen supporter to Turkey', Euractiv (17 August 2016), available at: https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/bulgarians-outraged-by-deportation-of-gulen-supporter-to-turkey/.

[141]Freedom House, 'Nations in transit: Bulgaria' (2023), available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/bulgaria/nations-transit/2023}.

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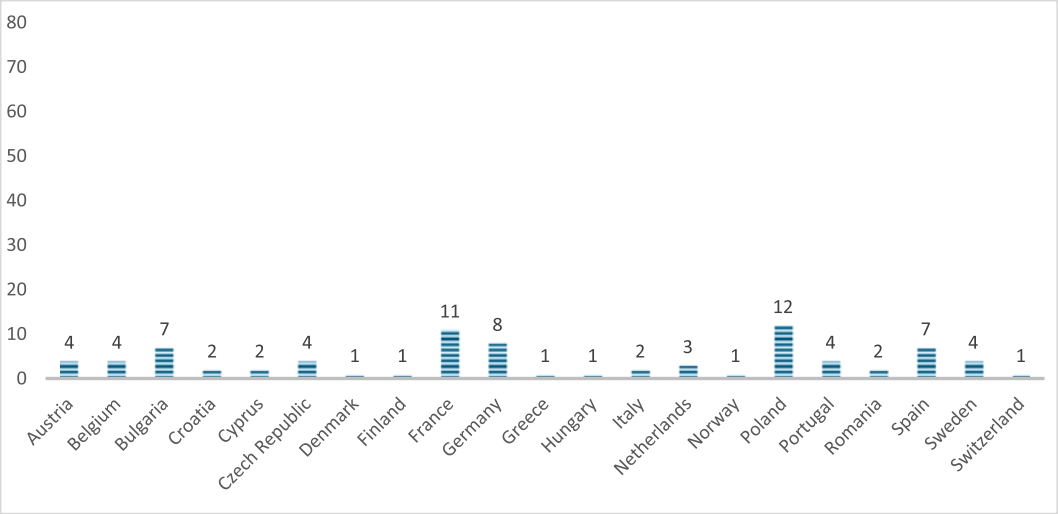

Figure 2. Transnational repression incidents in individual EU member states, 2014–2023.
Source: Freedom House, Transnational Repression Database, version 4, last updated 18 January 2023.

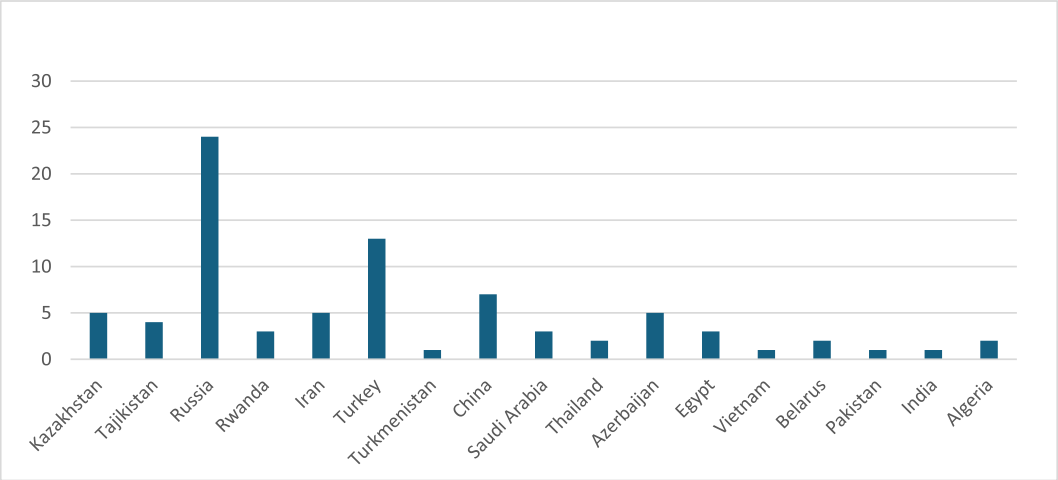

Figure 3. Transnational repression incidents counted by perpetrator state, 2014–2023.
Source: Freedom House, Transnational Repression Database, version 4, last updated 18 January 2023.

European Parliament has initiated a securitising move on transnational repression, its claims have failed to find resonance with the audience and produce a securitisation move. In this respect, as this study shows, it is important to view securitisation as a three-stage process: stage 1 where one identifies an issue to be called 'security', stage 2 of acceptance, and stage 3 of response mobilisation, where policy measures are adopted to counter the designated security issue. As this study demonstrates, the invocation of transnational repression as a security issue by the European Parliament did not produce its acceptance by the audience, and neither did it lead to emergency measures. Nevertheless, the European Parliament's position on transnational repression is substantial, and offers interesting insights into how parts of the European policy community approach transnational repression.

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One of the key challenges of securitising transnational repression is related to its inherent characteristics. Because of its hybrid and complex nature, transnational repression has been associated with different themes and security implications. Transnational repression issues are broad and heterogeneous, and they intersect national and human rights security dimensions. Additionally, they have broader global implications. Moreover, because of their murky nature it is very often difficult to establish the rules of liability and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. For these reasons, securitising transnational repression represents a challenge. As this study reveals, transnational repression is characterised by the presence of multiple actors with different perspectives and understandings of what transnational repression represents and how and whether it needs to be securitised.

In the current EU context, there are two divergent interpretations of transnational repression. One way of thinking about transnational repression is causal – transnational repression leads to human insecurity and violation of human rights across international borders and represents a threat to democratic values and the Union, and this is the reason why it needs to be treated as a security issue at the supranational EU level. The approach is largely 'human-centred', where transnational repression is not about (national) security but about people and their needs. Such views have been advocated by human rights scholars, NGOs, and the European Parliament. According to this approach, the European Union institutions and its Member States would formulate policies to protect its residents from external sources of repression by developing policy solutions, working with law enforcement agencies and facilitating legal redress, and establishing special institutions that would monitor transnational repression and provide support to affected individuals and communities.[142]

However, another way of looking at transnational repression is to view it as a national security issue embedded within larger frame categories of hybrid threats.[143] This is the approach adopted by the EU decision-making institutions and its Member States. From this perspective, transnational repression is articulated within the broader discursive framework of hybrid threats without necessitating the use of exceptional measures. Such understanding further implies that transnational repression is country specific and does not require supranational measures at the EU level.

These findings have relevant implications for what is understood as security and how it needs to be addressed. In this view, the problematisation of a security issue depends on the meanings that security language implies, and the framing of a problem thus guides policy responses. From this perspective, in the words of Jeff Huysmans, 'the meaning of security does not primarily depend on the kind of threats one includes but on the nature of the framing that security practice applies'[144] – thus, the conceptual and political rationality that security language invests in defining and interpreting a problem. In the current context, there are different perspectives on the meaning and policy responses to address transnational repression. These divergent interpretations are causing friction in the development of a common approach to tackle transnational repression within the EU's overarching political spectrum and are as a result symptomatic of non-acceptance of the securitisation process. Additionally, the securitisation of transnational repression has been further subject to actors' interests, preferences, and different security perspectives, further demonstrating a more complex reality that lies behind the (in)securitisation of transnational repression.

For the EU to securitise transnational repression, one would need to consider a more comprehensive approach. At present, there is a lack of reflection by the EU Commission and its Member States to distinguish between different forms of hybrid threats. The current definition of hybrid

[142]Citizen Lab, 'No escape: The weaponization of gender for the purposes of digital transnational repression,' Citizen Lab Report No. 180, University of Toronto (December 2024), available at: {https://citizenlab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Report180-noescape112924.pdf}; Andrew Chubb and Kirsten Roberts Lyer, 'Transnational human rights violations: Addressing the evolution of globalized repression through national human rights institutions', *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 16:3 (2024), pp. 770–93.

[143]See also Chubb and Roberts Lyer, 'Transnational human rights violations'.

[144]Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity*, p. 25.

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threats and what it means is problematic in the sense that it (1) remains vague and broad and (2) sheds little light on what constitutes authoritarian interference, and even less on policy responses to tackle it. As a result of such interpretation, transnational repression has been associated with other security narratives, connected to a more general master frame[145] on hybrid threats. Consequently, it has not been recognised as a security issue for which exceptional measures are needed. Such a narrow understanding obscures the complexity of the transnational repression phenomenon and fails to recognise the nuances involved in responding to the issue effectively.

To recognise transnational repression as a distinct threat category one needs to differentiate it from other forms of hybrid threats. Transnational repression raises a unique set of violations both at the human rights and state's national security levels. Therefore, a clear definition of transnational repression needs to integrate these two security dimensions and in doing so bridge the conceptual divide between internal and external security dimensions tied to transnational repression. This is an essential first step for the creation of standardised common understanding of transnational repression and the moulding of Member States' interpretation of the phenomenon. Such an approach would then entail a clear policy formulation of transnational repression and its labelling as an 'existential threat' to the Union's security and its values. This would further require a unified and coordinated response from the EU institutions and its Member States, as well as cross-sectoral cooperation. This is because transnational repression gives rise to a complex interagency issue that requires collaboration between authorities responsible for areas as diverse as foreign policy, security, migration, police and justice, and human rights, among others.[146] It would further necessitate tools to prosecute acts of transnational repression. Here, one could consider an expansion of law enforcement powers to criminalise and prosecute acts of transnational repression. The United States can be used as an illustrative case here. In the aftermath of the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, the country has initiated a series of policies and legislative measures aiming to counter transnational repression. Those include the so-called Khashoggi Ban, the Protection of Saudi Dissidents Act of 2021, and the Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention (TRAP) Act, mandating twice-yearly reports on the abuse of Interpol red notices. Additionally, law enforcement agencies launched a series of criminal cases against alleged perpetrators of transnational repression. The FBI website further provides a helpline and guidance for victims of transnational repression.

At the EU institutional level, the EU can further expand its current punishment mechanisms and tools. Here, targeted sanctions, as the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, may be used to bring the perpetrators of transnational repression to justice. In this way, the EU can play an important role as a transmitter of best practice, advancing solutions to transnational repression and establishing itself as a leading authority for tackling transnational repression. Yet, to achieve all this, the EU needs to ensure that such initiatives receive broader support among its Member States and resonate with European citizens.

Conclusion

This article set out to investigate the extent to which transnational repression has been securitised in the EU. To recall, the theoretical argument given by securitisation theory is that an issue becomes securitised when it is taken out of normal politics, which in turn amounts to exceptional measures.[147] It seems therefore uncontroversial to conclude that the designation of threat associated with transnational repression did not enable the pursuit of emergency measures in the EU. As demonstrated in this study, securitisation is an intersubjective process between different actors, institutions, and their power interests. Therefore, one has to look beyond the role of securitising actors and observe the processes and factors that shape the political agenda to understand why

[145]See further Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000), pp. 611–39.

[146]Citizen Lab, 'No escape'.

[147]Buzan et al., *Security*, p. 24.

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certain issues rise in security prominence while others do not. In this respect, the study reminds us that securitisation needs to be understood as a dynamic process conditioned by a variety of factors which include securitising power, political context, audience preferences, and the inherent nature of the securitisation issue. The analysis demonstrates that competing views between and within the EU institutions and actors, and the multiple framings and therefore interpretation of transnational repression, as well as a lack of political will from the Member States and EU core decision-making institutions, prevent the securitisation of transnational repression. In this perspective, the study reminds us to consider the role of audiences and their relationship to actors in the securitisation process. Therefore, even though transnational repression has penetrated the EU institutional agenda, it has not led to a securitisation move. The case of transnational repression, as such, is an example of how security issues fail to find resonance and be securitised in EU institutional fora.

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Appendix A: List of questions raised on transnational repression topic in the EU Parliamentary Plenary

2014	E-007406-14
2014	E-008716-14
2014	E-007126-14
2015	E-013335-15
2015	E-005532-15
2015	E-000012/2015
2015	E-003434-15
2015	E-004056-15
2015	E-001108-15
2015	E-006558-15
2016	E-006421-16
2016	E-001611-16
2016	P-002031-16
2016	E-000952-16
2016	P-000197-16
2017	E-005432/2017
2017	E-006314-17
2017	E-003932-17
2017	E-007569-17
2018	E-000051-18
2018	E-000288-18
2019	E-000374-19
2019	E-000204-19
2019	E-002089-19

(*Continued*)

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(*Continued.*)

2020	E-005505/2020
2021	E-005697/2021
2021	E-005019/2021
2021	E-000421/2021
2021	E-003080/2021/rev.1
2021	P-003120/2021
2021	E-002764/2021
2022	E-000378/2022
2022	E- 003825/2022
2022	E-000948/2022
2022	P-000947/2022
2022	E-003564/2022
2022	E-003404/2022
2022	E-003838/2022
2022	P-004046/2022
2022	E-003696/2022
2022	P-001277/2022/rev.1
2022	E-002980/2022
2022	E-003998/2022/rev.1
2022	E-004156/2022
2022	E-002563/2022/rev.1
2023	P-000551/2023
2023	E-001100/2023
2023	P-001725/2023
2023	P-001310/2023
2024	E-000459/2024

Appendix B: Interviews

Notes on interviews

Data were gathered from a dozen interviews and several other informal discussions with EU policymakers, civil society organisations, and political exiled activists. Interviews were conducted in Brussels in July 2023. A large proportion of interviews were also conducted online on Zoom from June–October 2023. Below are the details of the interviews used in this study.

Interviews

Interview 1: Representatives of Safeguard Defenders, June 2023 and October 2023 (Online)

Interview 2: Representative of ProtectDefenders.eu, October 2023 (Online)

Interview 3: EEAS Policy Officer 1, October 2023 (Online)

Interview 4: UNPO, July 2023 (Brussels)

Interview 5: Exiled political activist 1, July 2023 (Brussels)

Interview 6: EEAS Policy Officer 2, August 2023 (Online)

Interview 7: MEP 1, September 2023 (London)

Interview 8: MEP 2, September 2023 (Online)

Interview 9: Representatives of Freedom House, October (Online)

Interview 10: Exiled political activist 2, March 2021 (Online)

Interview 11: EEAS Policy Officer 3, July 2023 (Brussels)

Interview 12: Civil society activist from Dutch Foreign Interference Alliance (Alliantie tegen Buitenlandse Inmenging), 27 February 2024 (Online)

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Descriptive statistics
Frequencies
Statistics
incident

N	Valid	82
	Missing	0
Mean		3.00
Median		2.00
Mode		1
Std deviation		2.485
Variance		6.173
Minimum		1
Maximum		9
Percentiles	25	1.00
	50	2,00
	75	5.25

incident					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Detention	38	46.3	46.3	46.3
	Unlawful deportation	12	14.6	14.6	61.0
	Assassination	5	6.1	6.1	67.1
	Credible threat	5	6.1	6.1	73.2
	Assassination attempt	2	2.4	2.4	75.6
	Rendition	5	6.1	6.1	81.7
	Assault	12	14.6	14.6	96.3
	Deportation	2	2.4	2.4	98,8
	Intimidation	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	82	100.0	100.0	

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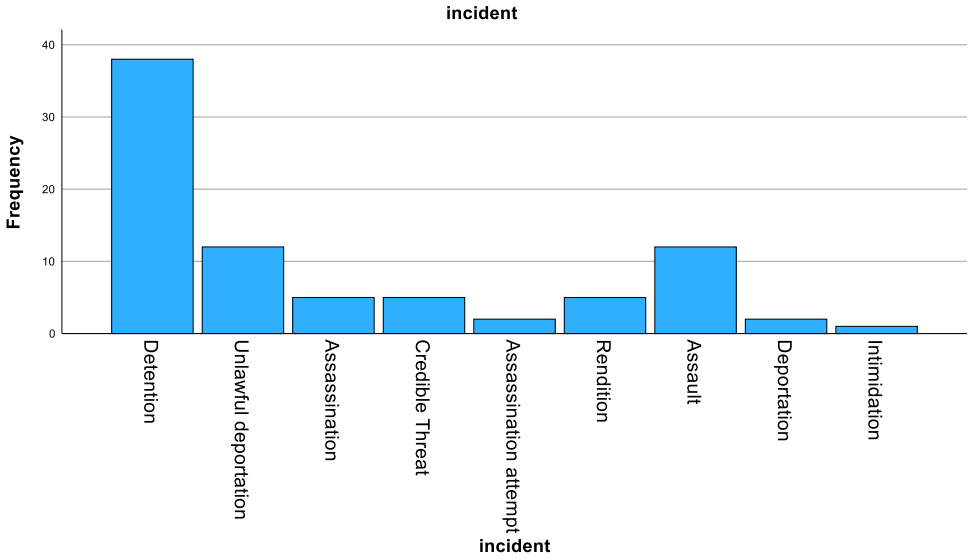

Frequencies
Statistics
Origin Country

N	**Valid**	**82**
	Missing	**0**
Mean		**6.18**
Median		**5.50**
Mode		**3**
Std. Deviation		**4.068**
Variance		**16.546**
Minimum		**1**
Maximum		**17**
Percentiles	**25**	**3.00**
	50	**5.50**
	75	**8.25**

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		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Kazakhstan	5	6.1	6. 1	6.1
	Tajikistan	4	4.9	4.9	11.0
	Russia	24	29.3	29.3	40.2
	Rwanda	3	3.7	3.7	43.9
	Iran	5	6.1	6.1	50.0
	Turkey	13	15.9	15.9	65.9
	Turkmenistan	1	1.2	1.2	67.1
	China	7	8.5	8.5	75.6
	Saudi Arabia	3	3.7	3.7	79.3
	Thailand	2	2.4	2.4	81.7
	Azerbaijan	5	6.1	6.1	87.8
	Egypt	3	3.7	3.7	91.5
	Vietnam	1	1.2	1.2	92.7
	Belarus	2	2.4	2.4	95.1
	Pakistan	1	1.2	1.2	96.3
	India	1	1.2	1.2	97.6
	Algeria	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	82	100.0	100.0	

Saipira Furstenberg earned her PhD from the University of Bremen in 2017. From 2018 to 2019, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Exeter. After completing her postdoctoral project, she worked as a lecturer at Oxford Brookes University. From 2022 to 2024, she was a Marie Curie Cofund Fellow at Ca' Foscari, University of Venice. Her research interests are in International Relations with a particular focus on the international dimension of authoritarian states.

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