

# EU Migration Governance as Protracted Conflict

A Conflict Transformation  
Perspective on the EU-Turkey Deal

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# List of Acronyms

AFD	Alternative für Deutschland
EU	European Union
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IO	International organization
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council

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# Abstract

This paper argues that we are dealing with a protracted conflict in EU migration governance, namely between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection. The conflict happens around their differing answers to the question of who is entitled to protection. This unresolved conflict contributes to sustaining violence at Europe's borders and perpetuates the policy deadlock on migration. Against this background, this paper uses conflict transformation theory for conceptualizing the conflict in the first place. In doing so, it reveals a previously obscured interdependence between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection. Thereby, the paper offers a more nuanced perspective on tensions between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection, creating space for transformative action beyond polarized positions. Drawing from conflict transformation theory again, the paper proposes the use of different tools such as interest-based negotiation theory, Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid and Maire Dugan's nested paradigm to move from positions to interests, understand the relationships of actors across different levels, and identify which system level has the most potential for change. Ultimately, this paper argues that acknowledging and transforming the protracted conflict between the securitization of migration and refugee protection normative frameworks is an important step towards addressing dysfunctions in migration governance, upholding human rights and principles of refugee protection and sustaining peace in Europe.

Key words: securitization of migration, refugee protection, protracted conflict, migration governance, EU-Turkey deal, conflict transformation.

# 1 Introduction

In March 2020, the humanitarian crisis on the Greek island Lesbos led to an escalation of violence between asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants,<sup>1</sup> Greek police and members of the host society. At about the same time, Turkey decided to open its borders as part of a political tactic, which prompted many refugees and other migrants to attempt passage into the EU – only to clash with security forces and be denied entry at the borders of EU member states (Mandiraci 2020). On this occasion, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) published a press release stating the following: “It is shameful that people seeking safety and protection arrive on Europe’s shores only to be threatened by the European forces. It is clear that vulnerable people are being used as pawns in a bigger political context [...]” (2020a). In the past five years, people – including members of the host society, refugees, and other migrants – on the islands of Lesbos, Chios and Samos in Greece have felt the negative impact of European migration policies, including various forms of structural, cultural, and direct violence (IRC 2020a; Galtung 1969). As frustration on all sides increases, tensions between stakeholders grow. According to the IRC, there is a need for a “new [European] response to forced migration that puts people, rather than border security, at the heart of policies (2020a).”

This violence is in part a result of the agreement between Turkey and the EU “[...] to end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU” (European Council 2016). At the heart of the so-called ‘EU-Turkey deal’ is border security. The deal was a response to the European ‘refugee crisis’ and has since shaped Europe’s response to immigration. Over the years, there has been a lot of debate and criticism regarding the legal validity and underlying humanitarian values of the deal. Although the EU claims the EU-Turkey deal to be in full accordance with EU and international law, humanitarian organizations have reported human rights violations against refugees and other migrants (Women’s Refugee Commission 2016; Amnesty International 2017; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017a; 2017b; 2020; IRC, NRC & Oxfam 2017; Médecins Sans Frontières 2017; Protecting Rights at Borders 2021). The deal’s inherent notion of migration as something dangerous and undesired has led to a policy of containment and cemented anti-migrant rhetoric (IRC 2022). This is diametrically opposed to the advocacy efforts and activities of the refugee protection regime, supported by numerous social movements and civil society initiatives that exist to welcome and support refugees and other migrants all over Europe. In this context, the EU-Turkey deal has further contributed to a polarization on the issue of migration in European society and has created a conflict in the migration regime driving violence at different levels, including structural, cultural, and direct forms of violence (Kleist 2022).

The social and human consequences of the EU-Turkey deal are indicative of critical challenges of EU migration governance. In 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit recognized that humanitarian tools alone are insufficient to resolve the increasingly protracted crises worldwide and that a more integrated approach of the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) sectors is required (Perret 2019). This also

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, this paper will use the term ‘refugees, and other migrants’ or ‘migrants, including refugees’ to reflect the reality of mixed migration movements and the fact that anyone on the move may have a well-founded fear of persecution and be entitled to international protection. The term includes asylum seekers. For more information, visit the following permanent information resource created by Jørgen Carling, Research Professor at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO): <https://meaningofmigrants.org/>.

applies to protracted crises related to migration, such as the one that has been unfolding in the Mediterranean Sea at the borders of Europe. The situation demands an integrated HDP approach that simultaneously addresses short, medium, and long-term needs. Additionally, the peace-migration nexus offers entry-points for creating more conflict-sensitive migration policies and migration-sensitive peacebuilding initiatives (Grossenbacher 2021). Yet, in the design and implementation of EU migration policies such as the EU-Turkey deal, peacebuilding approaches have been missing, as the ongoing criminalization of NGO activities (mainly of sea rescue operations) indicates (Council of Europe 2021).

Similarly, for a long time, the issue of migration was only addressed as a secondary concern in peace studies, policy, and practice (International Peace Institute IPI 2011). Today, there is a recognition that a better understanding of the peace - migration nexus is essential to the prevention and transformation of violent conflicts (Hayes et al. 2016; Hörler Perrinet et al. 2018; Grossenbacher 2020).<sup>6</sup> Research and practice show the importance of taking into account the ways in which migration, peace and conflict experiences intersect, not only at the origin of the migration, but at different stages of a migration journey (Mitchell 2011; Salehyan & Skrede Gledtisch 2006; Heller 2018; Hörler Perrinet et al. 2018; Grossenbacher 2020). This paper contributes to the growing body of research which conceptualizes migration crises as a situation of conflict instead, thereby inviting peace researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to engage more. More specifically, it offers a novel way of diagnosing the dilemmas shaping current European migration governance and proposes solutions from a conflict transformation perspective. It does so by applying a conflict transformation lens and approach to identify and unpack the protracted conflict between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection.

In this paper, I will demonstrate that we can talk of a protracted conflict when it comes to the EU's current migration governance and that a conflict transformation approach would allow us to find alternative solutions. The paper begins by introducing the EU-Turkey Deal, including some of the key developments that led to the creation and adoption of the policy, what it entails and why it is an ideal hermeneutical locus to highlight the conflict between securitization and refugee protection frameworks. Moving on, the paper draws from securitization theory to classify the EU-Turkey deal as a securitized migration policy and looks at the implications it has had for refugee protection. The chapter shows how the policy has shaped EU migration governance, sustained a heightened sense of crisis, and how it thereby clashes with norms and principles of refugee protection. This has resulted in a complex and intractable situation, which I conceptualize as a protracted conflict in migration governance. Drawing from conflict transformation theory, the paper then proposes the use of different conflict transformation tools such as interest-based negotiation theory, Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid and Maire Dugan's nested paradigm to move from positions to interests, understand the relationships of actors across different levels, and identify which system level has the most potential for change. Thereby, I demonstrate how a conflict transformation approach offers a more nuanced perspective on the so-called European "refugee crisis", paving the way for transformative action beyond polarized positions. Ultimately, this paper argues that transforming the protracted conflict between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection is one important step towards addressing dysfunctions in migration governance, upholding human rights and principles of refugee protection, and, ultimately, sustaining peace in Europe.

## 2 The EU-Turkey Deal

The EU-Turkey deal is an ideal hermeneutical locus to highlight the conflict between securitization and refugee protection normative frameworks. The case is particularly interesting as it has received a lot of critique for its negative effects on the rights and protection of refugees and other migrants. Yet, it has also repeatedly been described as a success, particularly in stemming irregular migration to Europe. This raises critical questions about migration governance and dilemmas regarding the delicate balancing of domestic security concerns and protection of human rights.

The EU-Turkey deal is the culmination of a development towards more restrictive migration policy that started in the 1970s in Europe. The period between 2015 and 2016, coinciding with an increase in refugees and other migrants arriving in Europe, has been referred to as the European 'refugee crisis'. It has also been argued that much of the 'crisis' had to do with the way Europe reacted and the restrictive policies that were created as a response. In 2015, as Hungary, Poland, and the Czechia refused to take in refugees as required by the Union-wide mandatory relocation scheme that was set up as a one-off emergency response to the 'refugee crisis', other EU governments also began giving in to internal populist pressure and left the coalition of those willing to welcome refugees and other migrants. At about the same time, the European Council, led by Germany, began negotiations with Turkey leading up to the signing of the EU-Turkey deal. The deal was sealed as the Balkan route closed. Both measures are evidence of a policy shift within the EU aimed at ending the 'refugee crisis' by shifting the main responsibility to deal with immigration to third countries and closing borders (Weber 2017).

In March 2016, the EU launched a plan together with Turkey, "[...] to end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU" (European Council 2016). The EU-Turkey deal builds on the EU-Turkey joint action plan, which was adopted in November 2015 and aimed at better coordinating migration management. Compared to the EU-Turkey joint action plan, the EU-Turkey deal includes the explicit goal of ending irregular migration from Turkey to the EU to break the business of smugglers and offer migrants an alternative to risking their lives (European Council 2016; European Council 2017). In the EU-Turkey deal, EU and Turkish leaders agreed that from 20 March 2016 all irregular migrants arriving in Greece would be returned to Turkey if they did not apply for asylum or if their claim for asylum was rejected. Further, for every Syrian returned to Turkey, a Syrian would be resettled in the EU. Turkey committed to preventing the opening of new sea or land routes for irregular migration to the EU and the EU promised to speed up the disbursement of the €3 billion allocated initially and offered further financial support (European Council 2016).

Turkey's rationale for the deal was partly based on the expectation that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would not last long, and therefore that refugees would only reside temporarily in Turkey, until they were able to return to Syria. Furthermore, Turkey agreed to the deal in exchange for certain benefits and the pursuit of its own political interests, such as EU accession (Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung 2017; Terry 2021). Europe's motives for the deal were linked to the challenge of processing large numbers of asylum seekers and the difficulty to share related responsibilities among member states. The various member states had their own reasoning, but for many the EU-Turkey deal was accepted as a welcome relief to internal tensions on asylum matters. The increasing public support for right-wing populist parties such as the Alternative für Deutschland AfD in Germany, which is first

and foremost an anti-immigration party, and increasing nationalism with strong views against immigration as witnessed in Italy, Austria, Switzerland, or the United Kingdom, suggest that many Europeans welcomed policies that aimed to defend their culture, identities and economies against perceived threats associated with immigration (The Conversation 2019). Additionally, events such as 9/11, the Silvesternacht 2015/16 in Cologne and the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris in 2015 have contributed to people's acceptance of anti-immigrant policies and practice (Trilling 2017; Betts & Collier 2017).

There have been regular EU reports on the progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal, all of which highlight the positive results of reducing crossings from Turkey to Greece. Indeed, the EU-Turkey deal has fulfilled its main purpose of curbing the number of refugees and other migrants arriving in Greece and moving onwards, thus temporarily bringing some relief to the EU and its internal tensions regarding migration. In March 2021, and despite the criticism by many NGOs working in the humanitarian field, EU leaders agreed to extend the 2016 agreement. Germany's then Chancellor, Angela Merkel, said that the deal had "proven its worth" because it had reduced illegal migration, made it more difficult for smugglers to operate and helped refugees (InfoMigrants 2021). However, what the reports fail to address adequately is the fact that this has come at a high cost for the lives and health of the people affected by it (European Commission 2017; Weber 2017; Médecins Sans Frontiers 2017). In other words, the statistic success of lowering the numbers of people reaching Europe has another face: "a far-reaching 'crisis of solidarity'" (Karakoulaki 2018).



# 3 Protracted Conflict

While some would argue that the peak of the ‘refugee crisis’ is over and the current unprecedented and unified response of EU member states to displacement from Ukraine will change EU migration policy for the years to come, EU migration policy is still in crisis (Kleist 2022). The treatment of refugees and other migrants at the Belarus-Polish border, the violent clash between migrants and authorities at the Morocco-Melilla border and the steady numbers of migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea suggest that the EU’s approach to migration – more specifically towards immigration of racialized individuals from non-European countries – is still shaped by the notion of ‘threat’. The EU’s securitized approach to migration continues to receive broad support in Europe, mainly from extreme-right and conservative populist parties with anti-immigration, anti-Muslim and racist agendas, and their voters. At the same time, since the adoption of the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, voices in support of international norms and principles of refugee protection and the de-militarization of borders also have grown louder. Consequently, the positions of state and non-state actors in favor of securitizing migration often clash with the positions of those interested in upholding norms and principles of the international refugee protection regime. **This paper contends that the on-going confrontation between the two normative frameworks – the securitization of migration and refugee protection – contributes to sustaining a polarized discourse and policy deadlock on migration in the EU.** In turn, this exacerbates the negative implications for EU migration governance and refugee protection and those who are subject to it.

Against this background, this paper reframes the current tensions in EU migration governance as a protracted conflict between the normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection centered on their differing answers to who is entitled to protection and characterized by its intractability and complexity. **In other words, we are dealing with a normative conflict around the question of who is worthy of protection, to which the two frameworks have two juxtaposed and seemingly incompatible answers.**

To better understand this protracted conflict, I first introduce the two normative frameworks of securitization of migration and refugee protection. Thereby, I use the EU-Turkey deal to illustrate how securitized migration policies come about and what implications they can have for refugee protection. Finally, the chapter shows how the EU-Turkey deal has shaped EU migration governance by cementing and contributing to a heightened sense of crisis and how its increasingly violent outcomes clash with norms and principles of refugee protection. This has resulted in a complex and intractable situation, which I conceptualize as a protracted conflict in migration governance.

## 3.1 SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies developed a theory of securitization from the 1980s onwards (Buzan et al. 1998; 1993). It has since had a strong impact on security studies and practice in the European context. Its most prominent contributors, Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, explore the significance and implications of a broad security agenda. In attempting to understand securitization, the starting point is to examine how issues become securitized – that is, how decisions are made about what is and what is not a security threat. According to the Copenhagen School and its securitization theory, an issue only becomes a security issue in international

relations when it is labelled as such. Further, the issue at stake must meet certain criteria to be classified as a security issue. Once an issue is elevated above politics and therefore staged as an actual existential threat, emergency measures may be taken. A decisive factor in the process is the audience. If it accepts this notion of threat, one can speak of securitization. Security, thus, is the outcome of a social process. The broad acceptance of an existential threat provides the legitimacy to break rules that would be binding in a non-emergency situation (Williams 2003). A distinctive feature of securitization is its rhetorical aspect. In order to argue for the inclusion of an issue into the security agenda, the issue must be presented as a priority and a shared understanding of a threat must be constructed. In other words, the securitization process can be considered a speech act: “By saying the words, something is done [...]” (Buzan et al. 1998: 26).

**While some scholars argue that contextualizing migration as a security issue could have positive effects, such as highlighting the plight of refugees and attracting more resources by pushing it higher up the political agenda, others highlight the risk of being misused as a pretext for states to deter the rights of refugees even more** (Newman 2003; Troeller 2003). Interestingly though, some argue that securitization is not in and of itself positive or negative. According to Floyd (2007; 2011), the security analyst should not only explore how, but also why actors securitize an issue. Their intentions can indicate the potential outcome of a securitizing move. Moreover, a securitization is complete only if the warning to the aggressor and/or promise for protection to the referent made in the speech act is followed up by a change in relevant behavior by a securitizing actor. Consequently, the moral rightness or wrongness of a securitization depends on its consequences (Floyd 2007; 2011). Such a perspective broadens the conceptual space for a nuanced analysis of the positions, interests and needs of securitizing actors, which is essential to a conflict transformation approach.

### *The EU-Turkey deal through a securitization lens*

The EU-Turkey deal was not only a symptom of its time, it has also contributed to the process of securitizing migration in Europe. The deal features a strong security perspective, as it seeks to control and prevent immigration. Its preoccupation with protecting Europe from refugees and other migrants rather than providing protection to them has influenced the politics and discourse on migration in Europe. Against this background and by drawing from the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory, this section looks at the discursive foundations and discussions of the EU-Turkey deal, to understand how it contributed to a heightened sense of a crisis and use of extraordinary measures. The latter clash with the norms and principles of refugee protection as they contribute to structural, cultural, and direct violence in refugee and other migrant communities, host societies and between different actors involved in migration governance.

On 7 March 2016, EU heads of states agreed that “bold moves” were needed “to protect our external borders and to end the migration crisis in Europe”. The statement issued by the European Council on this occasion ends with the following words: “These are urgent measures that have to be taken against the background of the present situation on the ground and should be kept under review.” (European Council 2016b). On 18 March 2016, the European Council issued a press release titled “EU-Turkey statement”, which declares that the EU and Turkey “decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU”. This was justified as a “[...] temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order” (European Council 2016a). Similarly, in December 2016, the EU emphasized the need “to replace

disorganised, chaotic, irregular and dangerous migratory flows by organised, safe and legal pathways to Europe for those entitled to international protection in line with EU and international law” (European Commission 2016).

**By framing the EU-Turkey deal as a measure to restore order and using words as ‘disorganised, chaotic, irregular and dangerous’ when speaking about migration, the EU constructs the perception of a threat and a crisis that requires urgent, out of the ordinary action.** These passages of the official EU statements on the EU-Turkey deal show two things. First, the deal uses language that suggests the existence of a crisis within the EU, for Europeans, and therefore the need to protect its own borders. Second, it uses language that creates a sense of ‘us’ against ‘them’, thereby contributing to an ‘othering’. The arrival of the ‘other’ is portrayed as a threat to ‘us’, as the following sentence shows: “We need to break the link between getting in a boat and getting settlement in Europe.” (European Council 2016b). The same sentence indicates a certain willingness to use violence, if need be, to stop people from leaving the boat.

The presentation of an issue as a clear priority facilitates the inclusion of the matter into the security agenda (Buzan et al. 1998). This applies to the EU-Turkey deal and its emphasis on ending irregular migration: “All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey” (European Council 2016). Emphasizing the need to stem irregular migration clearly suggests that so-called irregular migrants are the main threat at stake, and cements national populist representations of migrants as a threat to the economy, culture, and identity of Europe (Castles 2003; Walters 2010; The Conversation 2019). Identity is appealing to many because it is human, and everyone can relate to it (McSweeney 1996). EU politicians and policymakers can therefore easily make use of the notion of a collective identity under attack from outsiders to legitimize their actions. A focus on preserving the collective identity of EU citizens added to the public appeal of the EU-Turkey deal. By claiming to defend a collective identity and ensuring societal security, the securitization of migration led to widespread public perceptions of refugees and other migrants as threats, and consequently into mutual reinforcing images of the ‘other’ as an enemy (Waeber et al. 1993). The socially constructed notion of a crisis, which builds on perceptions rather than facts, can easily be manipulated for personal and political gains. The actual problem becomes hard to grasp and thus prone to misuse. The EU-Turkey deal and its surrounding discourse have contributed to an inflated perception of a crisis. This in turn has been misused for political gains and resulted in negative consequences for refugees and other migrants’ and, as a matter of fact, citizens of EU member states’ protection.

The EU-Turkey deal and its aim to end irregular migration has public appeal and sustains a speech act that has been broadly accepted: i.e., the need to protect the identity, culture, and economy of receiving states’ societies (Buzan et al. 1998; European Council 2017; Ayata 2020). Ayata (2020) contends that “the racist dehumanisation and criminalisation of migration [...] has entered the discourse over and over again for twenty years and recurred on an almost daily basis since 2015.” She argues that it has become a consensus in Europe that we seal the borders, even by turning to undemocratic means. This consensus, paradoxically, is partly based on the fear that more refugees and other migrants arriving in Europe could fuel the rise of fascism. In other words, policymakers, for example in Germany, have been reluctant to take a normative stance on asylum matters as they are paralyzed by a fear of playing into the hands of far right wing populist parties (Meier 2020). As a result, the militarization of migration continues (Ayata 2020). Such an analysis of why actors securitize, broadens the scope of positions, interests and needs to consider when analyzing what’s driving

securitization (Floyd 2007). Moreover it confirms the need to turn towards the real consequences of the securitization to be able to determine its moral rightness or wrongness. The Copenhagen School argues that once an issue is staged as a threat and accepted by the audience as such, it becomes securitized and legitimizes the use of emergency measures. **The EU-Turkey deal not only cemented the notion of migration as a threat, and a threat the audience has validated. But it has also served to justify extreme and extraordinary measures.** As such, the EU-Turkey deal can be justifiably considered an instance of securitization according to the Copenhagen Security Studies theory.

### 3.2 REFUGEE PROTECTION

The EU-Turkey Deal and its securitization approach stand in stark contrast to the international normative framework for refugee protection. The process of establishing a political, legal, and institutional framework for managing forced migration globally began with the creation of legal definitions, the drafting of universal human rights instruments and the founding of organizations with the purpose of protecting refugees at the end of the First World War. The years following the Second World War were significant for the development of the current international refugee protection regime, too (Boccardi 2002). The international refugee protection regime has since attempted to resolve pressing issues surrounding refugee protection with a rights-based approach. The principal instruments for international refugee protection are to date the Statute of the UNHCR, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (Boccardi 2003; Martin 2010). Yet, since its adoption, there has been a growing recognition that a significant number of people forced to migrate do not fall under the definition of a refugee according to the 1951 Convention (e.g., climate refugees). This raises questions about the underlying value base of the policy (euro-centric), and which states were involved in ratifying it (Sharma 2015). The states' role is particularly relevant in this context, as the application of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 New York Protocol is left upon the states to regulate in their own country (Boccardi 2003).

While there are valid critiques about the euro- and state-centric nature of the current international refugee protection regime, and its failure to accommodate the interests, needs and rights of people who seek international protection for different reasons, it has been successful in establishing international norms, principles, and actors that are an essential foundation for advocating for the rights of refugees and other migrants. For instance, in 2008, António Guterres, in his role as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, acknowledged the emergence of new patterns of forced migration not envisaged by the 1951 Convention. He therefore called for a global compact based on principles of international solidarity and responsibility sharing to tackle mass displacement. As a result, UN member states came together to discuss challenges and needs regarding migration globally, leading to the adoption of the Global Compacts on Migration and for Refugees in 2018.

Despite these developments at a global level, what the EU-Turkey deal exemplifies is a gradual shift away from principles of solidarity towards an increased perception of threat associated with migration. **European borders have become less permeable and, whenever possible, the 'refugee problem' is being externalized (Human Rights Watch 2015). Nevertheless, a broad range of actors, including migrants, citizens of receiving countries, human rights activists, civil society associations, social grassroots movements, NGOs and international organizations, act according to the principles of the refugee protection framework.** They not only provide humanitarian aid, but also advocate for human rights of migrants. Such pro-migrant initiatives have played an

important role in filling the void of political inaction and in making the social and human consequences of restrictive EU and national migration policy visible (Bojovic 2016).

### *Consequences of the EU-Turkey deal for the protection of refugees and other migrants*

Over the past years, actors on the ground have collected evidence of human rights abuses that contradict the claims of the EU that the EU-Turkey deal is in full accordance with EU and international law, including the norms and principles for refugee protection (Women's Refugee Commission 2016; Amnesty International 2017; European Council 2017; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2017; Human Rights Watch 2017a; 2017b; 2020; IRC, NRC & Oxfam 2017; Médecins Sans Frontiers 2017; 2019). According to their reports, the EU-Turkey deal has led to a policy of containment on the Greek islands. Since the 2016 agreement, thousands of refugees have been stuck on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Kos, Samos and Leros, forced to stay in overcrowded and dangerous conditions awaiting a decision for their asylum cases (IRC 2020b). After Turkey opened the land border with Greece in February 2020, Greek authorities responded by using military force against people crossing the land border. Despite a quick de-escalation of the situation, Greek authorities and unidentified paramilitaries have since started making increased use of different pushback practices, which are inhumane and unlawful (Cortinovis 2021).

Mental and physical health issues, which are either caused or exacerbated by the inhumane living conditions on the islands and the fear of being returned or pushed back, which result in anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide, have been continuously reported (MSF 2017; 2021; Human Rights Watch 2017a). The uncertainty caused by the EU-Turkey deal is identified as a major cause of psychological harm. Further, the safety and wellbeing of refugees and other migrants is endangered by inappropriate accommodation facilities (IRC, NRC & Oxfam 2017). Women and girls are particularly vulnerable as they are exposed to an environment of alcohol and drug abuse, violence, sexual harassment, and poor sanitary conditions (Women's Refugee Commission 2016). Other contested issues include the lack of fair and efficient asylum processes; the lack of oversight and checks and balances; the restriction of the right to movement; and the lack of access to essential resources such as legal counselling on the asylum procedure. Finally, the EU – Turkey deal has led to a lack of safe pathways to EU countries and thus forces people to turn to smugglers and undertake dangerous journeys. There is also a lack of alternatives such as resettlement, relocation, humanitarian visas, family reunification, or work and study visas (Médecins Sans Frontiers 2017/2021; NRC 2020).

The pressure to accelerate asylum processes, a failure to share the responsibility of refugee protection among EU member states, and a lack of sufficient resources and qualified personnel are some of the reasons for the humanitarian crisis on the Greek islands (Weber 2017). In 2020, the humanitarian crisis on the Aegean islands led to an outbreak of violence between the local population, asylum seekers and aid workers, as frustration over the situation increased on all sides. According to a joint briefing note by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Oxfam, "Greece has become a testing ground for policies that are eroding international protection standards" (IRC, NRC & Oxfam 2017: 2). The approach adopted by the EU to deal with immigration has had negative impacts on refugee protection, led to tensions and resulted in critical governance challenges. With its emphasis on securing external borders and limiting immigration, the EU-Turkey deal has contributed to securitizing migration in Europe rather than offering refugee protection. That is why the deal illustrates the tensions between the securitization

of migration and international refugee protection as the main normative frameworks that shape current migration governance and which clash with each other.

**There has been considerable public outcry from humanitarian organizations and human rights activists who criticize the effects of the EU-Turkey deal as a securitized migration policy. However, the EU has yet to acknowledge that the EU-Turkey deal represents a tipping point in the delicate balancing of being open to people rightfully seeking refuge and protecting their own interests** (Huysmans 2000). It continues to claim that the EU-Turkey deal is in line with EU and international law and creates safe alternatives for refugees and other migrants, emphasizing the goal of ending human suffering and the success in reducing numbers of deaths as outlined in the texts described earlier. In fact, the EU-Turkey deal includes passages that state all measures “[...] will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement” (European Council 2016). Moreover, the EU-Turkey joint action plan, which laid the ground for the EU-Turkey deal, sets out by highlighting the need for “solidarity, togetherness and efficiency” in the face of an unprecedented crisis (European Commission 2015). Yet, evidence shows that, based on a notion of a crisis, the EU-Turkey deal prioritizes the protection of European citizens from perceived threats in receiving countries over the protection of refugees and other migrants. Hence, migration is securitized and human rights are violated in the very name of human rights (Betts 2014). As suggested by Floyd (2011), the question that we must ask ourselves at this point is why migration is being securitized.

### 3.3 REFRAMING TENSIONS IN MIGRATION GOVERNANCE AS PROTRACTED CONFLICT

There is a growing body of literature that suggests migration regimes must be understood as conflicts. Georgi, for instance, argues that border regimes are not solely driven by the groups oppressed by them, nor should they be portrayed this way. Instead, they are to be reconstructed as complex conflicts. These conflicts around borders are “[...] fought out by a whole range of actors and different social forces, including the movements of refugees and migrant workers, communities of colour, the protests of liberal institutions and left-wing activists, the ambivalent position of trade unions and welfare organisations, the pressure of different capital factions, and the chauvinist reactions of nationalist and racist forces” (Georgi 2019, p.100). Moreover, even the state apparatuses, policies, and institutions that constitute border regimes result from social and political struggles that “[...] are fundamentally shaped by a set of migration-related structural contradictions within a capitalist and racist world system” (Georgi 2019, p.100). Similarly, Heller & Pezzani (2018) introduce the concept of a “mobility conflict” as they refer to the tensions that arise between various actors involved in governing migration and borders, including states, security institutions, international organizations, and civil society, as well as citizens and the migrants themselves. Due to the high number of deaths that occur through the Mediterranean Sea, because of EU policy, they argue, the Mediterranean Sea has become the frontline of a mobility conflict. A de-escalation of the conflict would require a change in migration policy and only a fundamental paradigm shift might put an end to a vicious cycle of political tensions and violence surrounding migration. Such a paradigm shift, in the context of EU migration governance, would require an analysis of the relationships and (power) struggles between the different actors involved, including their “shifting alliances, political offensives and defensive maneuvers” (Georgi 2019: 102). Moreover, acknowledging that no conflict can be

ended unilaterally, a process of conflict transformation would have to bring together the conflicting parties, and seek to address their needs, interests, and values so that they no longer clash with each other (Heller & Kasperek 2020). Finally, pushing against dominant interpretations of the complex relationships between borders, violence, and conflicts that are often trapped in a 'politics of fear', Brambilla and Jones (2020) introduce the idea of reconceiving borders as borderscapes, which are essentially sites of "generative struggles where alternative subjectivities and agencies could be shaped". **This important work of peace and conflict scholars to re-conceptualize borders and migration regimes as sites of political struggle and conflict urges us to recognize its political dimension, i.e., that migration governance is influenced by geopolitics, shaped by power dynamics, and characterized by different positions and interests.** This, in turn, opens the possibility of applying a conflict transformation approach.

**The analysis of the EU-Turkey deal through the lens of the two main normative frameworks shaping EU migration governance allows us to understand the institutional dimension of the larger mobility conflict at EU's borders.** Seeing migration regimes as manifestations of relationships between different actors that can be conflictive and can turn violent is necessary to address the negative consequences and the violence that is sustained through them. This is precisely what this paper offers in the remainder of it. Having established that the EU-Turkey deal is a case of protracted conflict between the securitization of migration and refugee protection normative frameworks, it suggests drawing from conflict transformation to address the conflict currently shaping EU migration governance.

# 4 A Conflict Transformation Perspective

The following chapter unpacks the conflict between the normative frameworks of securitization and the refugee protection regime that lies at the heart of current migration governance in Europe and advances practical solutions as to how to transform the conflict as a first step towards more effective migration governance and protection for all.

## 4.1 CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION THEORY

Conflict transformation theory provides peacebuilding practitioners and policymakers with theoretical guidance. While there are several authors who have developed transformative approaches to building peace in the Global North, including Johan Galtung (1969), Adam Curle (1971) and institutions such as the Berghof Foundation, the first comprehensive and widely recognized approach was developed by John Paul Lederach in “Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies (1997). Over the years, contributions by other scholars and practitioners have complemented this approach and begun to challenge the Western, colonial, and patriarchal foundation of international peacebuilding (Azarmandi 2018; 2021; Maldonado-Torres 2020; Hagen 2020; Haastrup 2022). However, the theory of conflict transformation developed by Lederach remains fundamental to understanding current approaches to international peacebuilding. Therefore, this paper draws on Lederach’s theory, while affirming the importance of decolonial, feminist, queer and intersectional perspectives in peace and conflict studies.

The understanding of conflict as a normal social occurrence is essential to conflict transformation theory. The focus is hence on the transformation of violent conduct into a peaceful one. Peacebuilding practice aimed at transforming violent conflicts often combines a multi-actor and multi-track approach with short-, medium- and long-term perspectives (Paffenholz 2013). This is informed by Lederach’s view of peacebuilding as a long-term process of systemic transformation and his emphasis on rebuilding destroyed relationships. According to his theory, key dimensions of this process are changes in the personal, structural, relational, and cultural aspects of conflict, brought about over different time-periods and affecting different system-levels, or ‘tracks’. Lederach’s theory urges us to explore how to address conflict in ways that reduce violence and increase justice in human relationships. Departing from an understanding of violence as encompassing structural, cultural, and physical violence (Galtung 1969), this is a useful lens through which to understand violence and injustices that occur in the context of migration and migration governance.

Moreover, according to Lederach in situations where choices are framed in rigid either/or terms it is difficult to handle complexity, hence the suggestion to shift to a both/and frame of reference. **In the context of European migration governance, which is characterized by an increasingly rigid either/or frame regarding migration – either securitization or refugee protection – conflict transformation is a useful strategy to reframe questions to reflect the legitimacy of their different but not incompatible goals.** It is also helpful to recognize interdependent aspects of a complex situation, develop integrative responses and seek innovative options for action (Lederach 2003). Building on this theory, I use conflict transformation as an approach to solve the conflict between the normative frameworks of refugee protection and securitization of migration the EU-Turkey deal hardened.



## 4.2 APPLYING CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION TOOLS TO EU MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

As a result of the conflict, discourse on migration in the EU has become highly polarized. Many people question the other side's positions and moral choices. However, refugee protection is interlinked with security concerns and the securitization of migration cannot be reduced to the action of a few actors. Moreover, the process of securitization is in and of itself neither positive nor negative, and one must focus on the intentions of the securitizing actors to assess its moral righteousness. This understanding is key to move beyond a polarized discourse. According to Huysmans (2000), the securitization of migration is a structural effect of a multiplicity of practices and if one wishes to interpret the effect, one must focus on the relation between the positions of the actors and the practices they perform. To this end, the following table was constructed to map and contrast the positions and practices of the actors involved in the securitization of migration and refugee protection.

**Table 1: Securitization of Migration & Refugee Protection: Similarities, Differences & Interdependencies** (table constructed by the author)

	SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION	REFUGEE PROTECTION
<b>Actors</b>	State as the securitizer; Public as the accepting audience; Security agencies as implementers; Citizens as the referent object of security; Refugees and migrants as threats.	State as duty bearer; UNHCR and civil society actors (non-governmental-, human rights-, humanitarian organizations etc.) as implementers; Refugees, migrants and citizens as rights holders.
<b>Core Principle</b>	The state, its citizens and their economy, identity and culture must be protected from external threats. Pragmatic approach to outcomes: deter threats.	Refugees have human rights and a right to international protection (1951 Convention). Principled approach to outcomes: fulfilment of rights.
<b>Approach</b>	Pragmatic approach to outcomes: deter threats.	Principled approach to outcomes: fulfilment of rights
<b>Methodology</b>	Securitize migration and treat refugees and migrants as threats to the state or society. Externalize and outsource migration interventions to protect societal identity and order.	Offer protection to refugees, demand fulfilment of rights and report abuses.
<b>Conflicting goals</b>	The protection of refugees might encourage more people to migrate and seek asylum, thus increasing the potential threat to the state and society. Furthermore, accepting and integrating a high number of refugees could change the local culture and affect the local economy negatively.	Securitizing migration could lead to a deterioration of the notion of refugee protection and thus curtail the human rights of refugees, as well as limit their agency.
<b>Interdependence</b>	In order to comply with international human rights and refugee law, the securitizing actors need the international refugee protection regime to accept or tolerate their actions.	To ensure protection to refugees, actors of international refugee protection must cooperate with securitizing actors. The possibility to act on behalf of refugee protection is dependent on political will and resources provided by states, as well as the support of the public & media.

The table helps to understand the securitization of migration and refugee protection frameworks, and how they relate to each other, by outlining positions and stated solutions to challenges associated with migration. The actors with implementing, watchdog, and advocacy functions in relation to refugee protection argue based on a human rights framework, while the securitizing actors refer to domestic interests, law, and policies. The former see their role in demanding the fulfilment of individual rights and reporting abuses, while the latter focus on providing security to the state, and protecting the nation's collective identity. Finally, a closer look at the conflicting goals

reveals a previously hidden interdependence between the two normative frameworks. This interdependence indicates common interests, which are often obscured behind declared positions that center on differing answers to the question of who has the right to protection.

### *Moving from positions to interests*

The polarization around the topic of migration in Europe has made it difficult to move beyond positions. Yet, according to conflict transformation theory (see 4.1), to identify innovative solutions in such complex situations, it is necessary to shift from rigid either/or terms to a both/and frame of reference. This is precisely why negotiation theory suggests that interdependent parties, such as the various actors involved in EU migration governance (see above table), should focus on interests rather than positions. Focusing parties away from their positions to using interests and objective criteria for making decisions might lead to solutions that maximize the meeting of all parties' interests, values, and needs (Fischer, Ury & Patton 1981). Following are some examples of ways to transition from a discourse about positions to one about interests, as outlined by the CDR Associates and Centre for Conflict Resolution and adapted to the context of EU migration governance (CDR 1997).

- Listen to underlying needs and concerns of different groups affected and involved in the conflict: e.g., facilitate dialogues between refugees and other migrants, members of host societies, civil society actors in host societies, national governments, security agencies etc.
- Encourage a discourse that avoids framing issues in win/lose terms: e.g., facilitate dialogue on migration between domestic and foreign affairs sectors, security, refugee protection actors etc.; offer trainings for journalists on how to report about migration in a conflict-sensitive way.
- Focus on the problem, rather than the person/actor: e.g., facilitate and encourage discussions about challenges/fears associated with immigration without focusing on the persons' background or party politics.
- Show how certain solutions can increase benefits of both parties: e.g., by highlighting the importance of upholding human rights principles as a way to improve the EU member states' reputation vis à vis like-minded states.
- Identify areas of common ground: e.g., strengthening local economies, access to job market, increased equality and stability.
- Use objective criteria such as human rights standards in evaluating options.

Interest-based negotiation is particularly useful when an ongoing relationship is important, when parties need to switch from adversarial interactions to more cooperative ones and when there are principles (e.g., human rights standards) that parties are bound to uphold (CDR 1997). This applies to migration governance, as global policy frameworks such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration as well as the Global Compact on Refugees have recognized the following elements as key to ensuring effective, coordinated and humane governance of migration:

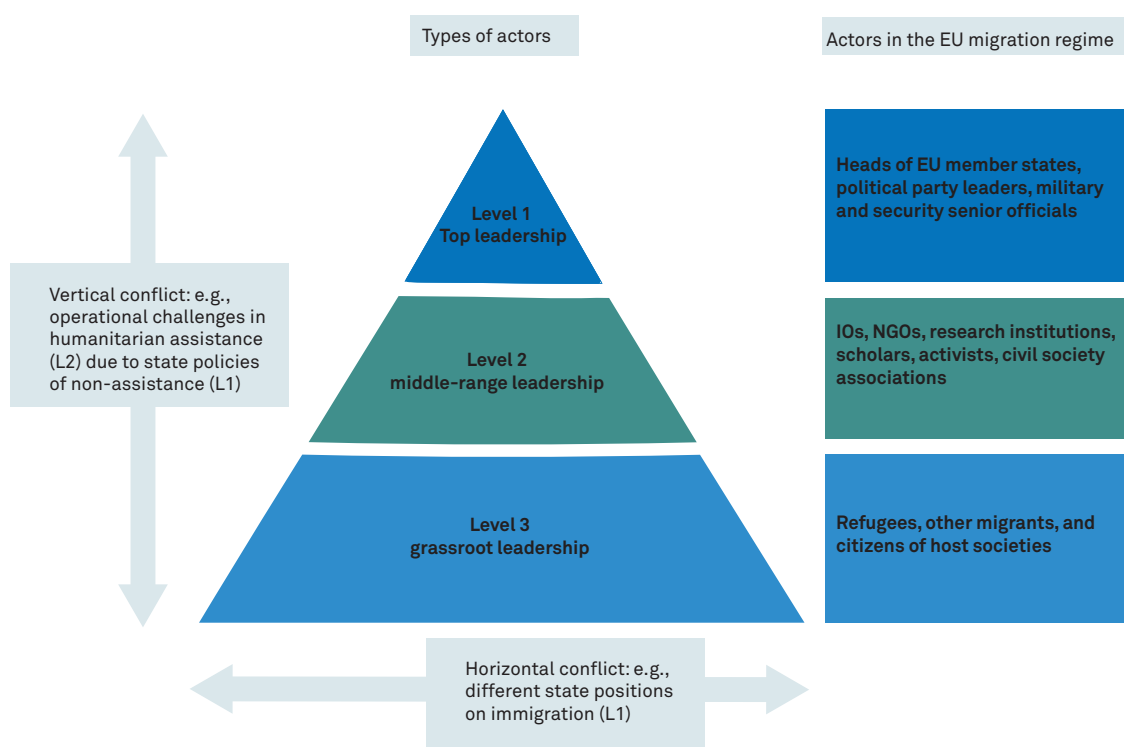
1. the relationship between actors at different levels of the migration governance system;
2. more cooperation between migration actors;

3. all actors involved in migration governance are bound to uphold human rights standards. Hence, a focus on interests rather than positions represents a first step in unpacking the protracted conflict at the heart of EU migration governance.

*Transforming vertical and horizontal relationships*

The following section disentangles the relationships between the different actors involved and affected by migration governance, by drawing on Lederach’s peacebuilding pyramid, which helps to determine who acts on each level and what actions are best taken at each level in order to build peace (Lederach 1997; Maiese 2003). Lederach identifies a significant gap “in the lack of responsive and coordinated relationships up and down the levels of leadership in a society affected by protracted violent conflict” (Lederach n.d.). Such a lack of coordination and dialogue across different levels can be observed in the EU Turkey deal. The relationship between those in favor of securitizing migration, thus primarily protecting citizens of the receiving countries, and those advocating for refugee protection, has become dysfunctional. This has led to a migration governance system that fails to meet the needs of refugees, other migrants, and citizens of the host society adequately. The following adaptation of the pyramid of conflict illustrates how actors at different levels are impacted by decisions made at different levels, as well as the vertical and horizontal potential axes of conflict between the normative frameworks of refugee protection and securitization of migration, and their respective actors.

**Figure 2: Vertical & horizontal axes of potential conflict between the normative frameworks of securitization and refugee protection**  
 (Figure adapted from Lederach’s peacebuilding pyramid by the author).



In the pyramid, the top is typically characterized as comprising the key political leaders in a conflict. They are highly visible, have a lot of power and influence, and are often locked into positions. The middle level includes people who are known by the top leaders and have significant connections to the grassroots level. Thus, even though they are independent, their status and influence depend on their relationships to the top and grassroots level respectively. However, the middle level plays an important role in connecting the top and bottom levels. Generally, it is flexible in its ability to maneuver. At the bottom level, Lederach refers to the masses or the base of society. The leaders at this level have first-hand experiences and understand the needs and interests of the people. Lederach argues that a comprehensive peacebuilding approach recognizes the need for processes of conflict transformation at and across each one of these levels (Lederach 1997; Maiese 2003).

The shape of the pyramid helps to visualize the number of people affected at each level: decisions that are made at the top level of a society by few key actors often affect many at the bottom level. In the case of the EU-Turkey deal, EU head of states, who are situated at the top of the pyramid, decided on a response to the so-called 'refugee crisis'. This decision affected many institutions, civil society actors and governmental authorities at the middle and bottom levels facing the difficult task of implementing the deal while upholding the rights and responding to the needs of refugees, other migrants, and members of the hosting societies. Finally, the deal had a huge impact on the lives of the people at the bottom level, including refugees and other migrants arriving on the Greek islands after March 2016 and citizens of the receiving countries. Lederach describes this as inverse relationships: While an individual at the top has decision-making power, that person is hardly affected by the consequences of the decisions made (1997). Individuals at the grassroots level on the other hand experience these consequences daily but have limited or no access to decision making. This points to a conflict along vertical lines, i.e., a top – down conflict between securitizing actors at the top and refugees and other migrants, as well as refugee protection actors at the bottom level. However, only focusing on the vertical dimension in European migration governance does not do justice to the whole picture. The Copenhagen School and its notion of an 'accepting audience', which is needed to securitize an issue, indicate that all societal levels include institutions and individuals that act as securitizing actors (e.g., a European citizen who is against immigration and votes for a party with an anti-immigration agenda, or media that reproduces negative representations and stereotypes of migrants). Thus, tensions also arise at all levels, between actors in favor of securitizing migration and those advocating for refugee protection, creating horizontal conflict lines.

In this context, the pyramid also helps to identify at which, or between which levels the conflict between the two normative frameworks manifests itself. For instance, at the top level, certain EU member states depend on other states (e.g., UN member states who adopted the Global Compacts), to accept or at least tolerate their securitizing actions. This indicates potential for a conflict across horizontal lines at the highest level. Another example is that the implementation of refugee protection programs at the middle level needs the endorsement of states at the top level, including allocation of resources and supportive policies. Lack thereof indicates a potential conflict between the middle and top levels.

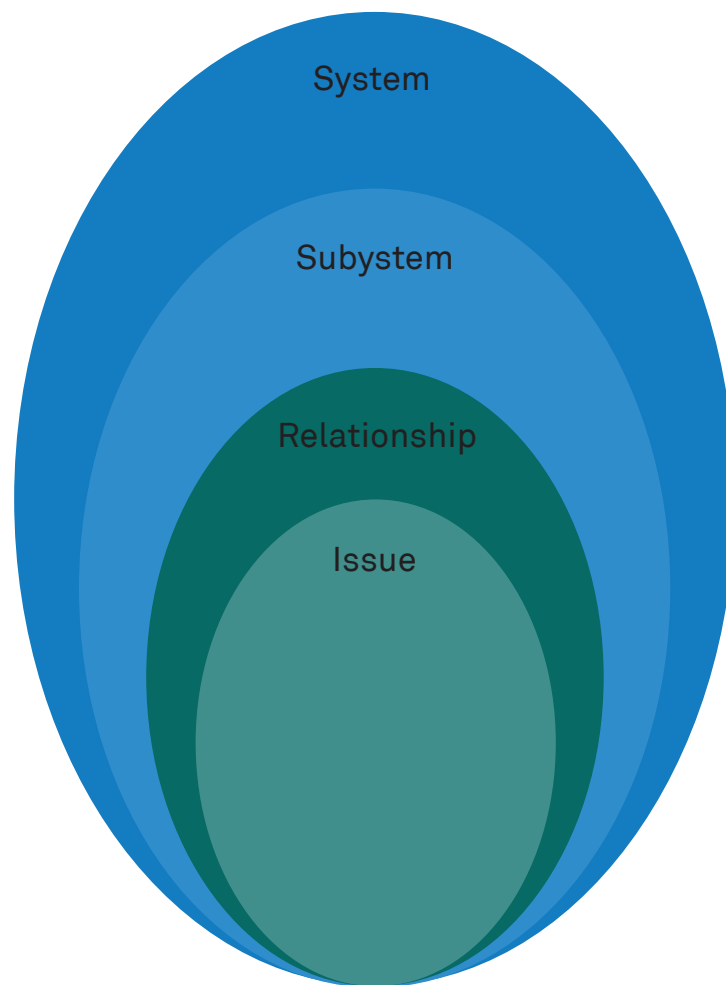
### *Bridging experiences*

The basic theory introduced by Lederach in 1997 remains important in the context of current European migration governance. Policies such as the EU-Turkey deal, as a top-down policy, have failed to ensure protection of people it affects, led to a

curtailment of their human rights and fueled polarization. Yet much hope is put into the same top leaders to ensure security and less attention is paid to the strength of the middle level to bring more people together to find solutions (Burgess 2017). In *Building Peace – A Conceptual Framework*, Lederach (1997) uses Mairie Dugan's nested paradigm as another way of looking at structural components of a conflict transformation framework. In her model, it is suggested that the subsystem level has the potential to connect different levels of activity. It can draw from valuable human resources and benefit from institutional, cultural, and informal networks cutting across lines of conflict, and thus has the qualities necessary to address systemic concerns, as well as relationships and immediate issues. Lederach uses the nested paradigm and the pyramid of conflict to suggest “the level with the greatest potential for establishing an infrastructure that can sustain the peacebuilding process over the long term appears to be the middle range” (1997: 60).

**Figure 1: The Nested Paradigm of Conflict Foci**

Figure derived from Lederach (1997: 56), *The Nested Paradigm of Conflict Foci*. cf. Dugan, M. (1996) *A Nested Theory of Conflict*. *Women in Leadership*. 1 (1), Source: Ouellet (2004)



Hence, what is needed to transform the protracted conflict in EU migration governance is a better alignment of politics and institutions (Woods et al. 2013), and an investment in what Lederach defines as the vertical capacity: “[...] the ability to develop relationships of respect and understanding between higher levels of leadership with community and grassroots levels of leadership, and vice versa” (Lederach n.d.).

Arguably, building on Lederach’s theory, the middle level has the potential to serve as a source for immediate action and act as a facilitator for conflict transformation processes by creating spaces for cooperation and dialogue across all levels. However, civil society actors in the middle range often face challenges and restrictions to their work as they navigate fields of tension related to power. Political and legal regulatory frameworks, the public environment and access to financial resources are some of the factors that influence their ability to make efficient use of their unique networks and resources. Therefore, on the one hand, a commitment of key actors at all levels of the migration governance system is needed to mobilize resources and efforts for dialogue and exchange between the levels and across divisions. On the other hand, an enabling environment for actors at the middle level to operate and realize their potential, for instance as facilitators within the system, is key and requires financial, political, and legal support from governments.

# 5 Conclusion

Based on the example of the EU-Turkey deal this paper has argued that the current EU migration governance is characterized by a protracted conflict between two normative frameworks. The conflict consists of a clash between the normative frameworks of securitization and refugee protection, centered on their conflicting interpretations of who deserves protection. Refugee protection actors' mission is to protect refugees, and other migrants, and uphold international laws. Securitizing actors consider the nation states and borders more protect-worthy. The advocates for refugee protection argue based on a human rights framework, while the securitizing actors refer to domestic interests, law, and policies. The refugee protection actors see their role in demanding the fulfilment of individual (refugee) rights and reporting abuses, the securitizing actors focus on providing security to the nation state and protecting its collective identity. The resulting tensions are driving and sustaining the so-called European 'refugee crisis', rather than providing pathways out of it.

To move beyond polarization and break the policy deadlock, this paper applied a conflict transformation lens and approach. This was useful to understand the relationships between the various actors involved in migration governance or affected by migration policies, as well as their underlying needs and interests. It revealed an interdependence between the securitization of migration and refugee protection frameworks, which provides entry-points to address critical challenges in the migration governance system. Drawing from three conflict transformation tools - interest-based negotiation theory, Lederach's peacebuilding pyramid and Mairie Dugan's nested paradigm - it explored a way to transform the conflict. This critically entailed three dimensions: to move from positions to interests, to understand the relationships of actors across different levels, and to identify which system level has the most potential for change. As such, it found that the conflict between the securitization and refugee protection frameworks in the context of the European 'refugee crisis' is sustained by a focus on positions rather than interests at all levels, a lack of coordinated action and dialogue between actors at different levels in migration governance (e.g., between states and refugees and host societies) and not enough investment in the intermediary or middle level (i.e., civil society).

Hence, what is needed from all actors involved is an investment in restoring horizontal and vertical relationships within the migration governance system and, most importantly, spaces for honest conversations about interests and needs related to protection, security, and human rights.

Against this background, this paper identifies the following action points:

- Protect the space and ensure conducive conditions for middle level actors to work and act as facilitators between the different levels in the migration governance system.
- Create spaces for dialogue between stakeholders at different levels.
- Invest in research on the peace-migration nexus which includes perspectives of, or is conducted by, refugees and other migrants, as well as citizens of host societies and civil society. Ensure that research findings feed into policy recommendations and dialogue.

- Critically assess opportunities, risks and limitations of reconciling refugee protection and security in the context of migration governance, with a view towards upholding human rights and ensuring non-selective protection.
- Improve accountability mechanisms and introduce peacebuilding/conflict transformation approaches for states and intergovernmental organizations such as the EU, as well as security actors, in regard to their migration policies and practice.
- Contribute to deconstructing the perception of immigrants as a threat and changing the harmful narrative on migration in politics, media and public.

In sum this paper showcased that a conflict transformation perspective offers a more nuanced space for coordinated, positive action. Transforming the protracted conflict between the securitization and refugee protection normative frameworks is an important step towards addressing dysfunctions in migration governance, upholding human rights and principles of refugee protection, and, ultimately, sustaining peace. Finally, the findings of this paper call for a more strategic engagement of peacebuilding policy and practice with migration, specifically in the context of EU migration governance.



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