

Securitization of the ULB region in polish-russian relations

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Securitization, as an IR concept, gained its classical form during the end of the 1990s, represented by the Copenhagen School. It brought a new twist to the classical understanding of security with the help of its postmodern basis and its focus on the language. Instead of proposing objective bases for threats to national security of a given country, it proposes that such threats are essentially socially constructed by “speech acts,” so to speak, through discourses. These discourses have four main components, namely referent object that is under threat, securitizing actor that defines the threat by its own discourses, functional actors whose positions are influential for the securitization process although not actively participating in it, and audience as the target of this speech act to be convinced about the existence of the specific threat. [2, p. 60; 3]

Baysal (2020) proposes a “dual framework” for a better understanding of securitization, which fuses many dichotomies and aspects in its framework, but the essential aspect of the given approach is the simultaneous analysis of the securitization process and the counter-securitization process as a “resistance to” the securitization process. Counter-securitization, as a move, not only “reject(s) and resist(s) the securitization argument of the primary securitizing actor, (but) also securitizes this actor. It presents the primary securitizing actor as a security threat.” [3, p. 11] In Baysal (2020)’s case, extraordinary, and usually violent, measures taken by both sides constitutes another aspect of this phenomenon; however, this aspect will be omitted in this paper since it is irrelevant to the Polish-Russian relations, and there have already been other uses of this concept prior to his usage, which had not assumed violence in definition. [Ibid]

Since the end of the Cold War, Polish foreign policy has been considered under the influence of a doctrine, created by Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski, two eminent authors of the journal “Kultura”, published by Polish dissidents in Paris under Giedroyc’s editorial during the Cold War. It has two names, the ULB Doctrine, named after the capital letters of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, or Giedroyc-Mieroszewski Doctrine, named after its creators. Roots of this doctrine can be traced back to Jozef Pilsudski’s views, who had been the most prominent political and military leader of Interwar Poland. Prometheism, as the generic name of Pilsudski’s views, defended transnational structures under Polish leadership in Eastern Europe, whether in the form of federation or of alliance, against the Soviet Union, historical background of which was Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its borders, which had essentially included besides Poland these three countries, and its rivalry against Russia.

Despite that background, it is a widely shared view in Polish and Western academia that the ULB doctrine accepted that such an attitude had assumed Polish domination on its eastern neighbours and criticised these plans as an example of imperialism. Instead, it proposed to establish a “friendship and cooperation” between Poland and its eastern neighbours, while advising Poland to accept its current eastern borders without any objections and to support their eastern neighbours’ independence [8, p. 50]. Another benefit of that is to ensure Poland’s security by establishing a buffer between Poland and Russia [8, p. 127]. Nonetheless, eminent experts regarding the topic, such as Ilya Prizel and Iwona Hofman, suggest that the ULB

Doctrine foresaw a detente and peaceful solution of problems between Poland and Russia, as well. [4, p. 81; 6, p. 96-97]

The general view of Russian IR studies is, however, the opposite. General assessment of them is that the ULB doctrine is the continuation of Pilsudski's imperialism, that the doctrine is aiming to lower Russian influence in the ULB region, that the doctrine is a part of anti-Russian policy agenda. [1, p. 19-20] The novelties brought by the ULB doctrine are not evaluated as game-changing, but instead the doctrine itself as the "modern(iser) of political approaches of the past," i.e. Pilsudski's Prometheism. [5, p. 83-85] While it is logical to defend that this gap between Western/Polish and Russian assessments stems from the conflict of interests of these two countries; I might propose there is also the role of securitization and counter-securitization processes happened between two sides over the ULB region.

The ULB doctrine, as the name suggests, is content with the independence of these countries, and with that Poland should be the first country for them to be aligned with. Therefore, Giedroyc and Mieroszewski were securitizing actors against the Soviet presence in the region during the Cold War, and a supposed Russian influence, or domination, in their assumed post-Soviet world. Their referent object is Poland, and then, the ULB countries. Their functional actor is the West, and especially European countries, as Giedroyc defends that Poland would be "accepted by the West as an equal partner only when its position in Eastern Europe . . . was strong," for which Poland must avoid the border conflicts and accept its eastern borders [7, p. 190-1]. And their audience were their readers, the dissident Poles and supposedly some but not many opponents of the regime residing in Poland. The doctrine's contribution to today's securitization discourse, conducted by the Polish government, is setting the referent object, but this time we observe the EU in every aspect of the securitizing discourse. Poland as the securitizing actor enters the region with the Eastern Partnership, the ULB countries can become referent objects if their government are supported by the EU, the functional actor is essentially the EU and its major powers, and audience are the ULB governments that should comply with the EU requirements, and Brussels that should invest more efforts in the region.

If we follow in Yudin (2019)'s footsteps, where he studied how Russian IR studies securitized the concept "soft power", it will be possible to discuss how the ULB doctrine has been securitized in Russian IR studies, as well. [2, p. 61-65] We should first notice that this case is a counter-securitization in the sense that the ULB doctrine had securitized the regional politics, and Polish foreign policy has followed in its footsteps. So, Russian IR researchers are the securitizing actor, while the threat is essentially Polish foreign policy that aims to limit Russian influence in the ULB region. Here, the referent object is generally constituted as Russia, and Russian people, in the sense that Russophobia, anti-Russian sentiments and similar concepts are proposed by these studies when discussing the topic. On the other hand, the ULB doctrine is generally discussed by evaluating current events while presenting general knowledge about the doctrine rather than thoroughly evaluating Giedroyc's and Mieroszewski's views and writings. This might be, I believe, a reflection of urge to securitize Polish foreign policy. Here, the doctrine is of importance, not as an object of a thorough discourse analysis, but because that it demarcates the region that is subject to securitization process.

In conclusion, the region consists of Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus is of great importance in the Polish-Russian relations not only as a result of geopolitical factors, but also as a result of construction. Specifically, discursive act committed by Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski had securitized the region through its supposed influence on Polish foreign policy. Nevertheless, the subsequent development of this process of securitization, and counter-securitization performed through Russian IR studies, are not necessarily connected to the original texts of these authors, except that their works demarcated the region to be securitized.

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