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***The Concept of Securitisation as a Tool for Analysing the  
Role of Human-Rights-Related Civil Society in Ethno-  
Political Conflicts***

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Studying ethno-political conflicts usually means focussing on root causes of the struggles between ethnic groups or by concentrating on the process of ethnicising conflicts. One main problem of both approaches is that they deal with conflict as a given thing. Instead of this, the concept of securitisation shows that, if we want to understand the dynamics of ethno-political conflicts, we have to analyse the process of how identities are socially constructed as threatened identities and of how this may lead to an escalation of conflict.

This working paper serves to assess the relevance of the securitisation concept in studying the role human rights-related civil society plays in ethno-political conflict. From our point of view one main advantage of using the securitisation concept is that we can distinguish between human rights-related activities of civil society which improve the human rights situation and those which breed escalation by using human rights as part of securitisation strategies.

The first chapter introduces what securitisation means, the second sums up the criticism it provokes, the third discusses how much the securitisation concept applies to the study of the nexus of human rights, civil society, and ethno-political conflicts, and the final chapter aims at contributing to the operationalisation of the securitisation concept.

## **1. The concept of securitisation**

The end of the Cold War evoked a debate whether security solely deals with the use or threat of military force. Many scholars preferred expanding the notion of security to issues of economy, environment, identity, or transnational crime. Traditionalists in the field of Security Studies, however, warned their discipline would lose coherence, if it broadens the agenda of security. Thus, Security Studies should exclusively examine situations where states fear, use, or threaten military force. The concept of securitisation aims at overcoming this controversy. On one hand, it is not limited to studying occurring or expected incidence of military force; on the other hand it strives for coherence through searching for the underlying logic of security (Buzan et al. 1998: 2-4).

Security is neither something out there waiting to be found nor can it be defined objectively (Wæver 2000: 251). Security is rather constituted in an inter-subjective practice. The starting point of the securitisation concept is the speech act theory developed by John Austin (1962) who demonstrated how we do things with words. The utterance of “security“ means an action (Wæver 1998). An issue may turn into a security issue, when an actor presents it as an existential threat to a reference object. An existential threat endangers the self-determination

and possibly even the mere existence of a political unit. Therefore, a security problem can “alter the premises for all other questions“, it is about the question to be or not to be (Wæver 1998).

The initiators of the securitisation concept analytically distinguish between five sectors of security, among them

- the military sector concerning relationships of force; the reference object usually is the state and the survival of the armed forces;
- the political sector regarding relations of authority, governance, and recognition, where an existential threat concerns a state’s sovereignty and ideology;
- the societal sector concerning collective identities (Buzan et al. 1998: 5-8, 21-23).

As survival is at stake, the securitising actor claims that a threat cannot be adequately addressed by ordinary measures. Instead it must be responded by emergency means. This use of all necessary means breaches the rules of normal politics (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 71). To frame an issue as an existential threat is deemed “to transfer it to the agenda of panic politics“ (Buzan et al. 1998: 34). In most cases, the adoption of extraordinary means implies escalation. In this paper, we understand escalation as an increase and de-escalation as a decrease in the severity of pursuing a conflict (Maiese 2003). Escalation leads to a violent or more violent conflict, de-escalation reduces the scale of violence or ends the use of all violent means. This definition refers only to a vertical escalation. In a horizontal escalation the conflict spreads over to additional issues and conflict parties.

It is decisive to distinguish between a securitising move and securitisation. Asserting an existential threat and requesting extraordinary means constitute a securitising move. An issue only is securitised, if an audience accepts the allegation that an existential threat exists and approves a response by emergency measures. Thus, securitisation is an inter-subjective practice: “(S)ecurity (as with all politics) ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subjects but *among* the subjects (...)“ (Buzan et al. 1998: 31, emphasis in the original).

Securitisation consists of three components:

1. claiming a threat to survival and demanding extraordinary measures,
2. adopting emergency action,
3. effects on the relations between the affected units by violating rules that otherwise bind (Buzan et al. 1998: 25f.).

As Ole Wæver (2000: 285) argued, there can be “scenarios sufficiently worrisome that responsibility entails securitization in order to block the worst“. Securitisation, however, is not desirable in all cases. In general, Wæver and Barry Buzan favour desecuritisation, this

means shifting an issue from emergency mode back to the normal process of political negotiation (Buzan et al. 1998: 4).

Although a separate chapter will deal with reviews of the securitisation concept, it is useful to sketch out some problems within the approach at this point in order to clarify the proper use of securitisation theory within the research on ethno-political conflicts. In contradiction to their statement that security / securitisation is an inter-subjective practice, its initiators write about a securitising actor in singular (e.g. Buzan et al. 1998: 24, Buzan & Wæver 2003: 71). Not only the securitising move which claims an existential threat and demands extraordinary means is regarded as a speech act, but rather “(t)he process of securitisation (...) is called a speech act“ (Buzan et al. 1998: 26). The acceptance of an asserted threat and the approval of emergency actions can be but are not necessarily a speech act of their own. However, one may regard this acceptance and approval as the effect of an utterance and therefore as a perlocutionary act. But this aspect of the speech act theory is rather neglected by the initiators of the securitisation concept who insist that “the utterance itself is the act“ (Buzan et al. 1998: 26, cf. Balzacq 2005: 176f.). Moreover, it is disturbing to label the assertion of an existential threat and the request for all necessary means as a “securitising move.“ Looking at the three components of securitisation, the acceptance and approval by the audience have to be regarded as well as securitising move. Claiming an existential threat and demanding breaking the normal rules should instead be called the “starting point of a potential securitisation“. It is due to this heterogeneous use of their key notions that the creators of the securitisation have to underline that a “securitising move“ alone does not constitute securitisation. They present the three mentioned components as elements of a “successful securitisation“ (Buzan et al. 1998: 26). It does not convince, however, to speak about a “successful securitisation“, since there cannot be a failing securitisation, if one takes the three elements seriously. Only the “securitising move“ can fail. This applies when the audience does not agree on the asserted threat and / or the proposal to use extraordinary means. In regards to success and failure, however, this underlines that coping with securitising moves is an open and contested process. The effect of securitising moves is not pre-determined but is a function of struggles about the alleged existential threat and the adoption of emergency means. A securitising move facilitates securitisation when it wins the hearts and minds of those persons who decide whether to use extraordinary measures or not. On this background civil society activities could be analysed as a means of fostering and initiating securitisation or to resist it. We understand civil society as space between the state, the family, and the market (Marchetti & Tocci 2007).

The concept of securitisation is impressive through its parsimony. Since the number of notions and statements remains small, it becomes even more important to use them precisely and consistently. This reproach, however, does not mean that the basic arguments of the securitisation concept should be rejected.

The securitisation concept is not a theory in a narrow sense that contains or generates testable hypotheses on causal relationships. As a theory in a broader sense it systematically organises a field of study and structures questions. Due to its generality the concept may be applied to regions with different processes of securitisation. It provides an abstract framework in order to map variations in security dynamics and to compare processes of securitisation and desecuritisation (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 84-87).

## **2. Securitisation and its critics**

Before discussing whether the concept is fruitful for studying ethno-political conflicts in general and for investigating the role of human rights-related civil society specifically, it is worth reviewing the reviews it has brought about.

Not surprisingly, the concept of securitisation has been criticised for its underlying idea to leave behind the traditional view of security. Its generality neglects what is essential for Security Studies, i.e. real or potential conflicts between large organised groups, complains Olav Knudsen (2001: 357f.). One can assume that he is not talking about conflict in general but rather armed conflict or even war. However, the key notions within the concept of securitisation as “existential threat“ and “extraordinary measures“ are rooted in Security Studies and indicate unambiguously that the question of violent conflict is not alien to the approach.

Moreover, Knudsen urges that the state should remain the central issue of International Relations and Security Studies and must not be downgraded to one level or sector among others (Knudsen 2003: 363). But theories that exclusively examine the relationships between states seem inadequate for research focussing on civil society activities.

### **2.1 The essence of threats**

The creators of the securitisation concept argue that one cannot define a threat objectively. For them, the crucial question is whether and how something is designated as a threat. While critical reviews recognise that perception matters, they stress that threats exist independently

from their perception (Knudsen 2001: 359f.). According to Thierry Balzacq (2005: 181), language does not construct reality but rather our perception of reality. Thus, a typhoon does not stop being a typhoon just because of what is said about it. Proponents of the securitisation concept may answer that their approach is about how political units construct and process threats. Whether people try to protect themselves against a typhoon, depends on their perception or non-perception of it.

Speech acts may not construct the reality completely but partially. By saying “I regard you as enemy and treat you as such“ the other can be turned into an enemy. If we search for so-called “real threats”, we risk overlooking those, which resulting from constructions. On the flip side, the securitisation concept sentences itself to failing to see threats that may destroy the self-determination or existence of a political unit but are not framed as threats by this unit. An ignored volcano or aggressive adversary can annihilate all prerequisites of constructing and processing threats.

Although this means a major objection against a premise of the securitisation concept, it does not seem quite relevant for a study of securitisation in the context of civil society activities in ethno-political conflicts which is not interested in all potential threats to ethnic groups or states but rather in

- whether and how an invocation of human rights by civil society actors leads to securitisation or desecuritisation,
- how efforts of conflict management, resolution, or transformation imply securitisation or desecuritisation.

## **2.2 Ethical considerations**

Reviewers recognise that Buzan and Wæver prefer desecuritisation in most cases since security itself is not necessarily a good thing (Buzan et al. 1998: 4). Nevertheless, through defining five sectors of security they have contributed to an expanded agenda of security set by decision-makers (Eriksson 1999: 316f.). In consequence, they took part in a process of securitisation. Wæver conceded to this problem. Even when one's writings strive for desecuritisation, they may unintentionally contribute to securitisation through reinforcing the discourse of security (Wæver 2000: 252).

Michael C. Williams points to painful consequences of being abstinent in the question of whether asserted threats really exist: Within the concept of securitisation an analyst has to be agnostic towards irrational, excluding, inciting, and even fascist speech acts (Williams 2003:

522). As a tool of examining discourses on threats, the concept of securitisation may influence this discourse. Primarily, however, it is a meta-discourse. The basis-level discourse on security includes discussions on which threats exist and even proponents of the securitisation concept may directly take part in these debates, not in their role as scholars of securitisation but as persons with a political opinion. Beyond this background securitisation theory and securitisation research have to be understood as a “second order observation” (Luhmann 1993) which observes how political actors observe themselves.

### **2.3 The neglected acceptance by the audience**

The explanation of the acceptance of an asserted threat and the approval of emergency measures has been criticised in two aspects:

Firstly, it remains to be unclear what exactly characterises an acceptance and approval by an audience (cf. Kaliber 2005: 323, Wæver 2003: 26). Moreover, even the notion of the audience lacks specification. In democratic states the constitution determines who is in charge of approving extraordinary means including the declaration of war, e.g. they prescribe the required majority in the parliament. In autocratic systems, the respective audience may be quite exclusive and limited to a junta, crisis committee, or to the dictator. Who, however, is the audience when we are talking about the societal sector, collective identities and ethnic groups? Is it its representatives in government or parliament, the majority of its biggest political party? In hindsight it seems to be easy to answer such questions since it has already been revealed who had possessed the capabilities to use extraordinary means. It adheres to the properties of ethnic conflict, especially in failing states, that ethnic organisations empower themselves to respond to asserted threats. If we want to analyse human rights-related activities of civil society, we have to consider the political environment of securitisation processes and the possibility that securitising moves mean a strategy of self-authorisation and amalgamation of actors and audience. Thus, securitisation could foster damaging democracy. Secondly, critics frequently found faults with what causes securitisation. Wæver (2000: 252f., 286, endnote 7) sketches out three facilitating conditions:

1. The speech follows the grammar of security and constructs a plot including an existential threat, a point of no return and a way out. Here, Wæver mainly repeats the properties of a securitising move.

2. The social capital of the securitising actor plays an important role. He or she has to be regarded as authority. Authority qua office, however, does not guarantee the success of the speech act.
3. Conditions are present that are historically associated with threats, e.g. hostile sentiments or a large number of tanks next to the border.

Wæver stresses that these conditions do not necessarily effect securitisation. There are no definite criteria for a successful securitising move. Thus, only hindsight shows who was able to initiate securitisation.

Other authors urge to put greater emphasis on the context and the distribution of cultural and symbolic capital (Balzacq 2005: 177-191, Bigo 2000: 194f.). In order to understand why some securitising actors succeed but others fail, one should consider the televisual representations of threats (Williams 2003: 524).

## **2.4 Understanding of collective identity**

Bill McSweeney labels the creators of the securitisation concept “Copenhagen school“ and rejects their understanding of identity. Following McSweeney’s viewpoint, for Copenhagen scholars identity simply exists, but is not seen as fluid. McSweeney, in contrast, regards identity as a negotiation process rather than as a mere fact of society. Collective identity is not out there waiting to be found, what is out there is only a discourse on identity. It is essential both to take perceptions of identity seriously and to have criteria in order to assess their objectivity. For him, “(t)he problem is to interpret identity claims, rather than assume their validity and coherence“ (McSweeney 1996: 83-91, quotation p. 91). Matti Jutila rejects as well regarding the process of identity formation as frozen. Thereby, the Copenhagen school blocks promising analysis and contributes to a totalising fiction (Jutila 2006: 176).

According to Williams (2003: 159f.), a securitising move claims a monolithic identity and thereby suppresses its flexibility and negotiability. Williams' argument follows the recommendation by Jef Huysmans to consider that identity and security constitute each other (Huysmans 1998a: 494, Huysmans 1998b: 238f.) Buzan and Wæver notice that McSweeney on the one hand demands more objectivity in analysing identity and on the other hand criticises their concept as too objectivist. They are sceptical whether one can distinguish between authentic and non-authentic identities just because identities are being constructed and shaped through political processes. If one analyses this coining, one never receives the final product of identity. Thus, the Copenhagen school treats identities as socially sedimented

and as potential reference objects of security (Buzan & Wæver 1997: 242-248). The securitisation of identities could thus be understood as an imagination of fixed identities. The formation of identities is never finished but the same holds true for all social phenomena. Values, political parties, and even states are also ever-changing and under constant (re)-construction. Scholars should be aware of that; one must not establish, however, that the sole legitimate research is concentrating on the formation of identities or other phenomena. Consequently, Securitisation Studies should investigate how security dynamics and identity formation influence each other. Yet, it is not up to them to trace the entire historical process of shaping an identity.

## **2.5 The relativity of normal politics and emergency means**

Securitisation implies that “normal“ or “ordinary“ politics or “rules that usually bind“ are left behind and extraordinary means are taken. Standard and deviation, ordinary and extraordinary measures do not mean absolute but relative concepts (cf. Wæver 2003: 27). What seems unusual for one political unit may be usual for another. This relativity guarantees the generality of the securitisation concept and its application to many circumstances. Additionally, however, it leads to the possibility that the same phenomenon in one occurrence may be a product of normal politics and another time is resulting from securitisation. Imposing harsh sanctions or declaring war may mean ordinary politics for one state but extraordinary measures for another. In contrast, after a war of many years, its termination but not its continuation can appear as unusual. In that context agreeing on new institutional arrangements does not mean necessarily the return to normal politics and thus desecuritisation as Emily Pia and Thomas Diez state while applying a conflict management perspective (Pia & Diez 2007: 5).

Similar to the distinction between usual and unusual means is that between ad hoc and institutionalised securitisation. If an asserted threat appears permanently or repeatedly, the feeling of urgency and the chosen response to the threat might become institutionalised as the example of the military demonstrates most obviously (Buzan et al. 1998: 27). While in medical terms panic and institutionalisation do not contradict each other, it is not self-evident whether institutionalised panic politics belong to the realm of what is logical possible. Is it a clear definable panic politic, if a state organises standing armed forces? Or does only the use of them denote that panic? In the latter case, it seems to be not very convincing to label standing military force as an example for institutionalised securitisation. Furthermore, the

notion of institutionalised securitisation concentrates on the extraordinary means but neglects both the speech act that asserts an existential threat and the reaction by the audience.

## **2.6 Securitisation as a Eurocentric and linear concept**

Claire Wilkinson (2007: 7f.) criticises that the Copenhagen school understands state and society in Western terms. Thus, it overlooks important characteristics of societies outside the regions labelled as the West. Moreover, the securitisation concept concentrates on open societies that grant basic rights and freedoms. In countries with freedom of speech, it seems appropriate to state that speech acts play a key role in constituting security issues. If the freedom of speech is lacking, however, significant parts of the population cannot communicate security concerns via speech acts. In such societies, migration or protest may express that a community perceives an existential threat and sees the necessity to adopt counter-measures (Wilkinson 2007: 12).

The Copenhagen school outlines a linear process of securitisation: the use of extraordinary means succeeds to a securitising move and its acceptance by the relevant audience. Drawing on the example of the so called Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Wilkinson (2007: 17, 20) claims that emergency measures were adopted without a preceding public demand to use them. The leaders of opposition justified the storming of the White House in Bishkek and the overthrow of the government only belatedly.

Advocates of the securitisation concept can bring forward an empirical and a principal objection to Wilkinson's argument. Firstly, Wilkinson missed to show that neither a securitising move nor its acceptance took place within the subgroup of demonstrators who stormed the White House. It is necessary to analyse those demonstrators instead of the opposition leaders. Secondly, the Copenhagen school claims that a successful securitising move leads to the use of extraordinary means. It is open to discussion whether the securitisation concept implies that every adoption of such measures necessarily results from a securitising move.

## **3. The relevance of securitisation theory for analysing human rights-related civil society activities in ethno-political conflicts**

Theories have to be quite parsimonious and abstract to allow comparative empirical studies on a so far neglected and under researched issue. This holds true for the nexus between

human rights, ethno-political conflict, and civil society (see for the links between human rights and peacebuilding Mertus & Helsing 2006). The concept of securitisation might fit into research that investigates how the use of human rights could (de)escalate ethno-political conflicts (see also Pia & Diez 2007). Beyond the fact that the securitisation concept shows a number of weaknesses, we should be interested in whether it offers new insights. Since one should regard the concept as a tool and not as an end in itself, one needs the promise to get a value-added or comparative advantage through applying ideas of the Copenhagen school. The following assessment reflects how much the categories civil society, human rights, and conflict fit into the scheme of the securitisation concept. Then, we will expand the discussion through sketching out possible links between the three central categories and thereby evaluating potential research focussing on human rights and civil society in ethno-political conflicts.

### **3.1 Securitisation and civil society actors**

Civil society actors can play a direct role in two of the three components of securitisation. They may work as a securitising actor and assert an essential threat that needs to be responded to by extraordinary measures. Civil society groups can as well be part of the addressed audience who supports or rejects the call to panic politics. As far as they execute adopted emergency means, they might appear as bad civil society or uncivil society. This term refers to those parts of civil society that use or propagate violent means. Despite this overlapping between the elements of securitisation and civil society action, we should question whether the concept of securitisation covers all important human rights-related activities. Within the research on civil society in ethno-political conflicts, the securitisation approach focuses on the question whether the use of human rights within political discourse is part of a securitisation or desecuritisation process and thus results in a contribution to the escalation or de-escalation of a conflict. One decisive theoretical question is, if there are institutional settings, notions of human rights, structural conditions or situational factors that functions as a firewall against the securitisation process (Pia & Diez 2007).

### **3.2 Securitisation and human rights**

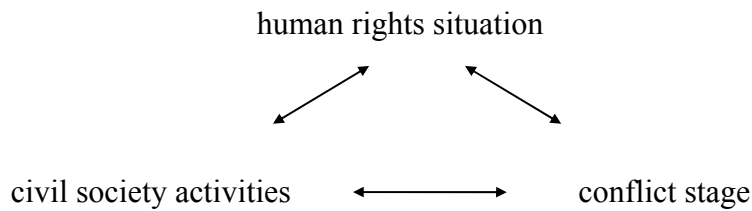
In the field of human rights we can distinguish between coping with human rights issues and changes in the human rights situation. We can define at least eleven ways of human rights-related politics:

1. violating human rights,
2. use of extralegal, unfixed instruments in order to improve the human rights situation,
3. use of existing human rights protection mechanisms,
4. demanding measures in order to protect human rights,
5. the corresponding rejection,
6. complaining that human rights are violated,
7. the corresponding denial,
8. expressing sympathy for the general idea of human rights,
9. the corresponding rejection,
10. the assertion that something constitutes a human right,
11. the corresponding denial.

If we adopt a broad understanding of civil society that also includes uncivil, i.e. violent action or violence propagating activities, we may examine the entire spectrum. If we prefer a narrow notion of civil society, we can look at those activities that can improve the human rights situation. We might analyse under which circumstances such activities effect securitisation or desecuritisation. Accordingly, we could investigate whether a change in the human rights situation results from securitisation / desecuritisation or brings about securitisation / desecuritisation. Our suggestion with regard to the securitisation theory is to focus on the use of human rights by civil society actors in the ethno-political conflict and thereby on the question of whether this use is part of a securitising or desecuritising move. Securitisation implies escalation and therefore can lead to the violation of other groups' human rights.

### **3.3 Securitisation and the links between human rights, civil society, and conflict**

If one is interested in analysing the links between civil society activities, the human rights situation, and stages of conflict, the securitisation concept offers some good theoretical insights on possible connections within this triangle:



This simple triangle consists of six directions:

1. civil society activities → human rights situation,
2. human rights situation → civil society activities,
3. conflict stage (defined by the level of escalation) → human rights situation,
4. conflict stage → civil society activities,
5. human rights situation → conflict stage,
6. civil society activities → conflict stage.

Each of the three corners serves twice as a cause or an independent variable and twice as a result or the dependent variable. If we do not want to examine neither only a single direction nor the entire triangle, we have to assess which relations seem to be of particular importance.

Ad 1) The question regarding the first direction is how activities by civil society actors influence the human rights situation. Three results are possible: they improve the human rights situation, they make it worse, or have no effect. We may observe all these outcomes or concentrate on a chosen one. Those who prefer studying best practices probably likes to investigate the amelioration. Those who want to apply the securitisation concept in its width, can analyse how civil society actors aggravate the human rights situation through contributing to securitisation or improve the state of human rights via facilitating desecuritisation. We have to take into account that the corners “human rights situation“ and “stage of conflict“ do not become irrelevant for such questions. They determine the scope of action for civil society groups such as the absent freedom of movement impedes activities in order to improve the human rights situation or to struggle for peace.

Ad 2) The second direction deals with effects of the human rights situation on the activities of civil society groups. As demonstrated, this relation can be integrated into a research question that puts the first direction into the centre of interest. However, it can as well constitute a research agenda of its own. In the context of violent ethnic conflict we may search for the minimum of respect for human rights that still enables some civil society activities. We can evaluate the assertion that an inverted U exists, when we trace the impact of the human rights on civil society activities related to human rights. In cases of grave mass-scale violations of human rights and missing basic freedoms, civil society has virtually no chance to be active at

all and to improve the human rights situation. At the other end of the spectrum, where human rights and basic freedom are in place, civil society activities may be quite irrelevant, since the state already respects human rights. Consequently, human rights-related efforts by civil society groups have the greatest impact in the middle ground where only limited freedoms exist besides significant violations of human rights. When applying the securitisation concept, we could be interested in the circumstances under which civil society actors refer to similar human rights situations by securitising, desecuritising or non-securitising or moves. Non-securitising moves try to block securitising moves (see section 4.2).

Ad 3) The third direction links the conflict stage with the human rights situation. Obviously, the intensity of the conflict and the state of human rights are correlated. When a conflict turns more violent, it worsens the human rights situation, whereas de-escalation means less human rights violations. Looking at this simple relationship, this direction should not be too prominent in further research.

Ad 4) The fourth direction describes the stage of the conflict as a cause for human rights-related civil society activities. Seemingly, this relation leads back to the second direction as it links the stage of the conflict and the civil society activities via the human rights situation. The state of the human rights and thereby the conflict stage can be both a motivation for and a limitation of civil society activities. These activities can include securitising, non-securitising, or desecuritising moves or effects.

Ad 5) The fifth direction is about how different human rights situations result in different stages of conflict. The real or perceived violation of human rights may lead to an armed conflict between large organised groups. This relationship, however, does not seem to be linear. Håvard Hegre and his colleagues found out that the relationship between the level of democracy and civil war resembles an inverted U. This is true both in strict autocratic regimes and in democratic states where civil war is less likely than in the grey zone between autocracy and democracy (Hegre et al. 2001). Leaned against this finding, one can assume that an inverted U exists as well for the relationship between the human rights situation and armed conflict. While very harsh autocratic regimes with extreme violations of human rights suppress the possibility of mass-scale armed struggle, democracies show more respect for human rights and thereby avoid civil war. States in between strict autocracies or distinct democracies, however, provide fertile ground for responding to grave human rights violations by armed conflict or civil war. If the conflict parties are fighting relatively constantly throughout the country, the third direction (conflict stage → human rights situation) prevails. Consequently, in these cases the end of the war results in a better human rights situation, but

it is not attributed to less human rights violations that the war is then terminated. If, however, the fighting takes place only in isolated areas and not continuously, it is more probably that an improved human rights situation in other regions of the affected country contributes to ending the war.

Ad 6) The sixth direction concerns how civil society activities impact the conflict phase, i.e. how they contribute to escalation or de-escalation. Ultimately, the chain

civil society activities → human rights situation → conflict stage

is only an indirect and particular variant of the general link from civil society activities to the conflict phase. As this link starts with an actor, the securitisation concept again has substantial relevance. Civil society actors themselves can make securitising, non-securitising, or desecuritising moves or contribute to such moves taken by other actors.

We do not claim that this overview integrates all relevant points; it is striking however, that the effects of civil society activities on the human rights situation and on the conflict phase seem particularly important. The link from the conflict stage to the human rights situation is quite simple and thus uninteresting. The consequences of the state of the human rights for the conflict stage in most cases are only relevant prior to escalation. The directions human rights situation → civil society activities and conflict phase → civil society activities resemble each other. As influences on the civil society activities they can be integrated into a research design that concentrates on the impact that civil society activities have on the human rights situation and the phase of conflict. Such a research design takes into account that the state of human rights and the conflict phase are both causes and results of civil society activities. This endogeneity is not an invincible methodological problem, if we conduct longitudinal analyses and combine them with cross-case comparison (cf. Collier, Mahoney & Seawright 2004: 100f., George & Bennett 2005: 234).

#### **4. Towards an operationalisation of securitisation**

One main problem of the securitisation concept lies in its ambiguous connection to empirical research designs. In the following part we want to discuss some possible ways of the operationalisation of the securitisation approach. The focus of our suggestions is on the different influences civil society actors can have on conflicts by referring to human rights. They could foster securitisation as they could desecuritize or they could make non-

securitising moves using human rights. Moreover, they may belong to the audience that is addressed and to those who implement the adopted measures. The following sections discuss securitisation, non-securitisation, and desecuritisation separately.

#### **4.1 Securitisation**

How can we see whether an actor asserts an existential threat to a reference object? The Copenhagen school provides a list of keywords we can look for: “survival” or the question “to be or not to be”, “point of no return”, “everything else will be irrelevant”, and “alter the premises for all other questions.” These notions and clauses concern not only the mere existence of a reference object but as well its self-determination and even its values (Buzan et al. 1998: 24, Buzan & Wæver 2003: 387-390, Wæver 1998). In order to cover the threat of expulsion one should also look at the existence at a certain place. We can rank these properties of a reference object. The most drastic threat is to the existence, and then comes the threat to self-determination, it follows the threat of being expelled, and the least drastic threat is to one’s values.

In ethno-political conflicts as in our cases, collective identities are particularly important. Since collective identities evolve and change to internal and external developments, the Copenhagen school finds it “extremely difficult to establish hard borders that differentiate existential from lesser threats (...). Given the conservative nature of ‘identity,’ it is always possible to paint challenges and changes as threats to identity, because ‘we will no longer be us’ (...). The abilities to maintain and reproduce a language, a set of behavioural customs, or a conception of ethnic purity can all be cast in terms of survival” (Buzan et al. 1998: 23, cf. Roe 1999: 196f.). Wæver adds that security activities on behalf of identity reduce the sense of security as they reveal the contingency and incompleteness of security (Wæver 2003: 253).

Since we cannot expect that actors always use the exact words of the securitisation concept, we should also consider equivalent or related notions and statements. Phrases or works close to the survival at stake or “to be or not to be” are death, end, annihilation, extermination, extinction, eradication, apocalypse, genocide, massacre, bloodbath, slaughter, carnage, and proper names that refer to such incidences.

The self-determination is inflicted by notions as loss of freedom, becoming vassals, prisoners, hostages or slaves, colonialism, usurpation, tyranny, oppression, to be at the adversary’s mercy, and proper names that refer to well known examples.

When securitising actors claim a threat to the habitat they typically speak about the loss of homes, property, or roots of the reference object, or use proper names that point to such events.

Since values are so numerous and amorphous, it is difficult to outline asserted threats to them. Presumably, a securitising actor refers to values, when he or she thinks that it is not appropriate to claim direct threats to survival or self-determination.

Phrases as “everything else would be irrelevant”, “the threat alters the premises for all other questions”, and “nothing would be as it is now” all serve to stress the threat both to the existence and self-determination. Phrases that express urgency such as “the point of no return is near”, “time is running out” or “we must not hesitate” do not alone define an existential threat. Therefore, they have to be linked to the threats to the mentioned properties of a reference object. Besides the asserted threat, the alleged urgency shall justify the demand for extraordinary measures.

As outlined in the chapter on the criticism the securitisation concept has provoked, it must be defined for each respective case, who constitutes the relevant audience and what marks an approval of all necessary means. In ethno-political conflicts civil society actors are not identical to those who decide to turn to panic politics. Consequently, their activities address an audience consisting of all or some decisions-makers within their own ethnic group, the state or in the international context. Whoever belongs to the decision-makers, depends on the political level a given unit exists at and its degree of democracy. Research should distinguish between the audience the civil society group wanted to address and in actually who were really addressed. Securitisation implies the use of extraordinary means. Therefore, we have to demonstrate that measures are adopted that deviate from the respective standard politics. This task proves difficult when we examine states, political parties, or movements or other units that have only recently come about.

This working paper indicates that we may include into research how civil society activities contribute to securitisation without being neither the securitising actor nor a part of the addressed audience. Such a plan, however, could easily result in a pure denouncement of civil society actors, if we examine all indirect effects of their actions. The following, hopefully exaggerated, example shall demonstrate this problem: A civil society group complains that the human rights situation in its country is disastrous and demands action in order to improve it. An ethnic entrepreneur refers this assertion and claims that the human rights of his group are gravely violated. His accepted suggestion to prepare for a battle of survival leads to civil war and to mass crimes committed by militias of the ethnic entrepreneur. Is it fair and

appropriate to conclude that the civil society group contributed to securitisation and even to war crimes? Was Jesus responsible for the crusades or Charles Darwin for the racist ideology of the Nazis? It is almost always possible to assert some links between known outcomes and chosen events in the past. This is why even the most absurd conspiracy theories appeal to many people. For that reason, we should be extremely cautious when trying to trace civil society's indirect contributions to securitisation. Nevertheless, with consideration of the securitisation concept we should distinguish between "the goodies" and "the baddies" and systematically collect best practices of the former one in order to get a notion of how to avoid securitisation referring to human rights in ethno-political conflicts. The same holds true for corresponding contributions to non-securitisation and desecuritisation.

#### **4.2 Non-securitisation**

Since desecuritisation means transferring an issue back to normal politics, we need another notion to signify situations where securitising moves fail or even do not happen at all. These situations are to be covered by the term non-securitisation (Roe 2004: 285, Wæver 2003: 23f.). We can distinguish between at least four types of non-securitising moves in general and by civil society actors in particular:

1. denying the asserted existence of an existential threat,
2. warning that an addressed audience does not possess the legitimacy to decide on the adoption of extraordinary means,
3. recommending the addressed audience to reject the call to panic politics,
4. resisting the implementation of extraordinary measures.

In most cases, such civil society activities (press releases, other publications, demonstrations, etc.) are reactive and thus include a direct reference to a certain securitising actor or to the audience he or she addressed. In addition, civil society may start preventive non-securitising moves that are set out to avoid that securitising moves will occur and succeed. Ironically, if widely discussed, the non-securitisation may provoke the counter-mobilisation of securitising moves which it actually wanted to prevent.

Non-securitising moves have failed, when securitisation takes place. While it seems easy to demonstrate such failure, the opposite is true regarding their success. If securitisation does not occur, it is not necessarily due to the reactive or preventive non-securitising moves by civil society actors. In order to reveal the civil society's impact, we have to trace a causal link from the outcome "non-securitisation" to the non-securitising moves. We should find direct

reference to these activities within the public statements of securitising actors or the addressed audience. Additionally, we might ask securitising actors or members of the respective audience about the influence of civil society activities. Nevertheless, it remains quite demanding to rule out rival explanations for the outcome of non-securitisation. If we try to analyse the effects of civil society actors, this is at such a high expense that we are compelled only to examine very few examples.

### **4.3 Desecuritisation**

Desecuritisation is only possible, when securitisation has taken place and the decision to apply extraordinary means is still in force. Desecuritising moves demand that an audience returns to normal politics. The desecuritising actor may present five types of arguments in favour of leaving the realm of panic politics:

1. The asserted existential threat never existed.
2. The existential threat existed but has been avoided.
3. Ordinary measures suffice in order to respond to the existential threat.
4. Panic politics are not effective in addressing the threat.
5. The extraordinary measures avoid the existential threat, their side-costs, however, are too high.

The explicit decision to continue the usage of extraordinary measures or the refusal to decide again over their use marks the preliminary failure of desecuritising moves. Parallel to non-securitisation, the actual problem lies in demonstrating the success of desecuritising moves by civil society actors.

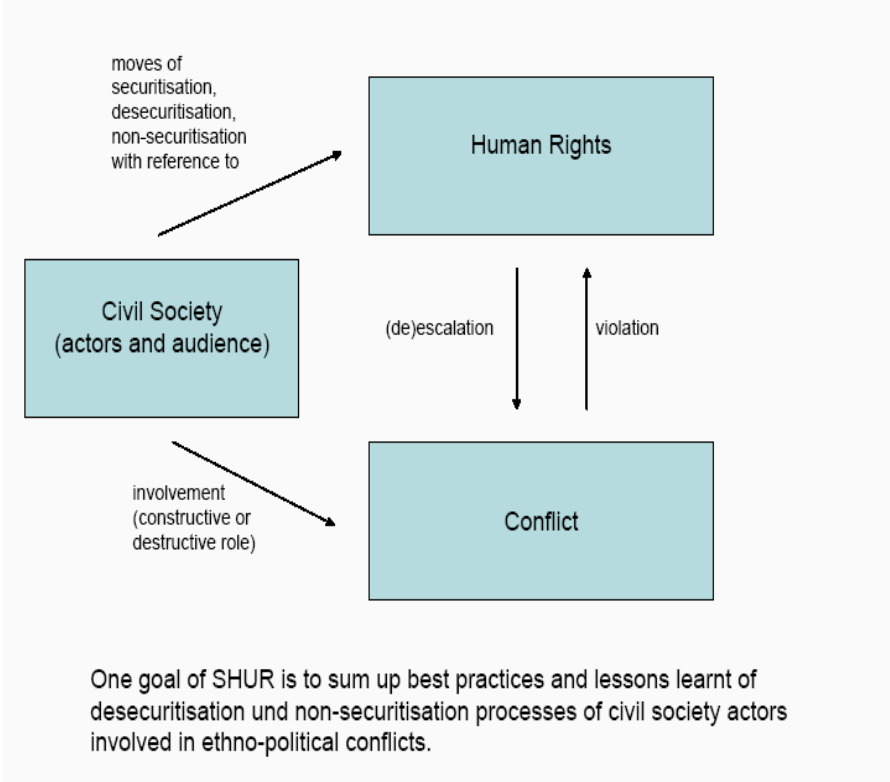
## **5. Conclusion**

The starting point of securitisation is a securitising move that asserts an existential threat to a reference object and demands to apply all necessary means. Securitisation takes place, if this securitising move succeeds and an addressed audience agrees on the assessment of the alleged threat and approves the use of extraordinary means. Desecuritisation consists of transferring an issue back from panic politics to normal politics. Non-securitisation signifies situations in which securitising moves fail or do not take place at all.

Critics find fault with the pure constructivist understanding of threats, uttered ethical considerations, and pointed to the neglect of the audience. They evaluated the concept of

identity within the securitisation concept as not appropriate and stressed the relative meaning of ordinary and extraordinary means.

As it is quite abstract and parsimonious, the securitisation concept may contribute to research on human rights-related civil society activities in ethno-political conflict. Taking civil society actors as focus, we can analyse their non-securitising, securitising, and desecuritising moves using human rights as a reference. While it is somewhat easy to demonstrate the failure of those activities, it is quite challenging to trace the causal line from the positive outcome to the activities by a civil society group. But that also should mean that one goal of such a research using the securitisation concept is to sum up best practices and lessons learned about desecuritisation und non-securitisation processes that are influenced by civil society actors in ethno-political conflicts. The following figure shows possible links within the triangle from a securitisation theory perspective.



We were interested in studying the links between civil society strategies, ethno-political conflict, and human rights, and discussed the theoretical contribution of the securitisation concept. This paper concludes that the effects of civil society activities on the human rights situation and on the conflict stage are of special relevance. Moreover, we suggest treating both the state of human rights and the conflict stage not only as result of the civil society activities, but as their cause as well. Such a research design means a compromise between the

triangle consisting of civil society activities, the human rights situation, and the conflict stage and causal line from civil society activities via the state of human rights to the conflict.

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