

FROM CRISIS TO DOCTRINE: A DECADE OF MIGRATION SECURITIZATION AND STRATEGIC DEFIANCE IN HUNGARY

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Abstract. *This article examines how Hungary, between 2015 and 2025, reworked migration policy into a doctrine of sovereignty-driven securitization. What started as short-term crisis responses became a governing toolkit that joined restrictive law, threat-heavy messaging, and calculated non-compliance with EU rules. Read through securitization theory and differentiated integration, the shift turns migration from a welfare or demographic matter into the main stage for asserting state sovereignty. The study employs a critical case study design, drawing on governmental speeches, EU court rulings, media campaigns, and regional declarations, alongside secondary scholarship. The findings demonstrate that Hungary not only entrenched legal resistance and fortified its borders with symbolic and technological infrastructures, but also mobilised regional alliances to contest supranational authority. In doing so, it recast European integration as conditional and strategically reversible. The article argues that Hungary exemplifies a broader post-liberal mode of governance in which the language and institutions of liberal order are retained yet redirected toward sovereignty-first objectives. The case offers a potential template for how member states can recalibrate supranational authority from within, embedding fragmentation as a structural condition of the European project.*

Keywords: Migration, securitization, Hungary, sovereignty, European Union, strategic non-compliance, compliance minimalism, post-liberal governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his 2025 State of the Nation address, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán once again placed migration at the centre of Hungary's political identity. He rejected the European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum as an existential imposition and credited his government with defending the nation against demographic and cultural dissolution (Orbán, 2025). This declaration was not an isolated flourish. It capped a decade in which migration pressures, the geopolitical turbulence of the war in Ukraine, and continued movements from Africa and the Middle East combined to shape Hungary's security posture. Since 2015, the government has assembled what it now treats as a migration security doctrine. This framework reshapes domestic governance while recalibrating Hungary's relationship with European norms on borders, law, and solidarity.

This article contends that Hungary's migration stance between 2015 and 2025 is best understood as the consolidation of a sovereignty-centred securitization doctrine. Hungary's doctrine operates on three connected fronts: legislative restriction, symbolic narrative, and persistent defiance of EU legal demands. Rather than isolated measures, these fronts interlock into a single logic that draws authority from a civilisational threat narrative. Migration is cast as a stand-in for broader geopolitical struggles rather than as a social challenge, allowing the state to speak both as Europe's sentinel and as its critic.

This trajectory reflects a wider shift toward what can be described as post-liberal security governance. Integration mechanisms remain in place, but they are redirected to privilege sovereignty over collective norms. Legal instruments, institutional procedures, and even the language of compliance are

retained, yet retooled to consolidate national authority. Unlike the government's preferred label of "illiberalism" (Orbán, 2014), post-liberal governance is less a slogan than a method of rule. Thus, post-liberal governance preserves the institutional shell of liberal democracy, keeping courts, procedures, and compliance scripts formally intact. Yet these are reoriented to sovereignty-first objectives through legal redesign, administrative practice, and symbolic politics.

The argument builds on securitization theory (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2006) and on differentiated integration (Schimmelfennig, 2018) to map the transition from emergency reaction to durable state doctrine. Border construction, asylum law reform, and targeted public campaigns did not remain temporary tools. They were assembled into a coherent strategy that endures beyond crisis moments. Within this framework, the state elevates migration from a demographic or humanitarian question to an existential vector of risk that legitimises institutional reconfiguration, political centralization, and heightened executive authority.

Existing scholarship maps core aspects of this transformation. Research traces how migration securitization shaped electoral dynamics in favour of the ruling party (Bíró-Nagy, 2021; Batory, 2021) and how intensified border practices reframed territorial governance and national identity (Waterbury, 2020; Scott, 2023). Officials spoke of Ukrainians in humanitarian terms while casting the 2015 arrivals as a danger, producing a selective humanitarianism filtered by ethnicity and geopolitics (Vidra & Messing, 2025). Taken together, the literature points to a field organised by clear lines of inclusion, exclusion, and legitimation.

At the European level, Hungary has resisted integrationist migration governance. It refused the EU's 2015 relocation quotas, litigated in the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU, 2020), and enacted legislation criminalizing civil assistance to asylum seekers (CJEU, 2021). Hungary remains outside the core proposals of the New Pact (European Commission, 2020) and promotes alternatives through the Visegrád Group (Visegrád Group, 2021). The European Parliament's 2022 report links migration policy to a broader pattern of democratic erosion (European Parliament, 2022). The case exposes enforcement gaps in EU governance and shows how member states can leverage institutional fragmentation to assert autonomy.

This article makes two contributions. It first identifies the legal, symbolic, and institutional elements of Hungary's migration securitization as parts of a unified doctrine. It then evaluates how this doctrine interacts with and reshapes European migration governance, institutional coherence, and security integration. In doing so, the analysis demonstrates how selective adherence and strategic non-compliance recalibrate the boundaries of European integration. Post-liberal governance emerges as a process of refunctionalisation: institutional forms remain intact, yet their operational purpose shifts toward sovereignty consolidation.

The structure follows directly from this agenda. Section 2 outlines the methodological approach, Section 3 presents empirical findings by period and theme, Section 4 interprets them through securitization and differentiated integration theory, and Section 5 draws implications for EU migration policy and institutional cohesion.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This critical case study treats Hungary as a strategic exemplar of sustained migration securitization and its implications for European security governance. Case selection rests on three grounds. First, a coherent securitization narrative spans a full decade, enabling longitudinal analysis. Second, the approach generated legal, political, and symbolic confrontations with EU institutions, exposing tensions between sovereignty claims and supranational governance. Third, Hungary projected its model through the Visegrád Group, creating a vector for diffusion and coordinated resistance.

The framework joins securitization theory (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998) with differentiated integration (Schimmelfennig, 2018; Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2014). This dual lens links threat construction to the elasticity of multilevel governance and clarifies how states assert sovereignty from within EU structures.

2.1 Data and triangulation

The corpus covers 2015–2025 and spans six source classes, each tied to a specific analytic function. Texts were coded thematically around policy instruments, compliance events, and framing signifiers, then cross-checked across source classes for convergence.

1. Governmental speeches and consultations

State of the Nation addresses (2017, 2022, 2025), National Consultations (“Stop Brussels!”, “Soros Plan”), and official communications on the New Pact. Function: identify securitizing moves, stated objectives, and claimed mandates.

2. EU legal and policy texts

CJEU judgments (C-808/18, C-821/19), the Commission’s 2020 New Pact Communication, and the European Parliament’s 2022 Article 7 report. Function: establish legal baselines, breach points, and institutional responses.

3. Media ecosystem and NGO monitoring

Hungarian Helsinki Committee reports on enforcement patterns, combined with (Vidra & Messing, 2025) on post-Ukraine discourse. Function: observe framing, practice, and adaptation.

4. Peer-reviewed scholarship

Core studies in securitization and integration documenting institutional change (e.g., Bíró-Nagy, 2021; Waterbury, 2020; Scott, 2023). Function: theoretical anchoring and longitudinal interpretation.

5. Regional and intergovernmental declarations

Visegrád Group communiqués and joint statements (2015–2021). Function: trace coordination on relocation, border control, and “flexible solidarity.”

6. Regional comparative research

V4-focused analyses of migration and crisis governance, including work on the Ukraine divergence (e.g., Czyż, 2024; Glied & Zamęcki, 2021). Function: corroborate diffusion patterns and the weakening of bloc coherence after 2022.

2.2 Units Of Analysis And Coding

Units of analysis are distinct policy acts, legal decisions, official speech events, media campaign artifacts, and regional declarations. Close textual analysis was paired with thematic coding of instruments (fences, surveillance, asylum procedures, NGO regulation), compliance events (infringement actions, CJEU outcomes, administrative responses), and signifiers (sovereignty, security threat, civilisational danger, illegal migration, Brussels imposition). Coding proceeded iteratively with constant comparison. For each unit the analysis recorded source, date, actor, instrument, and signifier set to enable temporal mapping.

2.3 Analytic Strategy

The framework joins securitization theory (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2006) with differentiated integration (Schimmelfennig, 2018; Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2014) to trace how threat construction travels into institutional design within a multilevel governance field. The strategy combines process tracing across 2015–2025 to link discourse, law, technology, and diplomacy; triangulation across source classes to test convergence and identify discrepancies; a contrastive reference to the German reception trajectory to situate crisis governance choices; and a regional lens on V4 coordination to capture diffusion and fracture.

2.4 Design And Epistemic Stance

The study is structured as a theory-oriented plausibility probe (George & Bennett, 2005) that uses a crucial, most-likely case to test mechanism plausibility. The purpose is conceptual refinement rather than sample-wide generalization. The epistemic stance is illustrative-analytical within an interpretivist logic, sharpening theory through close tracing of institutional, discursive, and symbolic structures. This orientation aligns with the post-liberal turn in European security governance, where states retain liberal-

democratic forms and refunctionalise them toward sovereignty-first outcomes (Lottholz, 2022). Internal validity rests on triangulation across legal documents, government communication, and secondary monitoring sources. The design's reliability follows from structured coding protocols, while the single-case scope limits external generalization and instead advances mechanism plausibility.

3. RESULTS

3.1 From Crisis Response to Sovereign Doctrine (2015–2016)

Hungary's securitization drive moved into high gear during the 2015 refugee crisis and, from there, laid the groundwork for a lasting governance approach. The immediate policy responses included the construction of a 175-kilometer border fence along Hungary's southern frontier, the declaration of a "migration state of emergency," (Jaroszewicz & Gniazdowski, 2015) and significant amendments to the Asylum Act enabling rapid rejection of claims and establishing transit zones as de facto detention centres.

These measures diverged sharply from the humanitarian approach adopted by Germany, whose policy under Chancellor Merkel prioritised moral responsibility and legal protection obligations (Schammann et al., 2021). While Germany mobilised institutional capacity toward reception and integration, Hungary's leadership portrayed the same events as a civilisational confrontation, embedding the language of existential threat into state policy from the outset. This contrast reveals Hungary's path not as a reactive aberration, but as a calculated strategic departure from dominant EU crisis governance norms.

State-sponsored campaigns such as "Let's Stop Brussels!" and the "Soros Plan" consultations portrayed the EU not only as a threat to Hungary's demographic and cultural integrity but as an active agent undermining national sovereignty (Hungarian Government, 2017). The October 2016 national referendum on the EU's mandatory refugee quotas, with 98% of valid votes rejecting the quotas despite insufficient turnout for legal validity, was presented domestically as a public mandate for defiance (Batory, 2021). This strategic attitude extended migration securitization beyond immediate border protection, embedding it deeply within Hungary's political, legal, and symbolic governance frameworks.

Legally exceptional, symbolically civilisational, strategically defiant. This triadic pattern began defining the emergent doctrine.

3.2 Institutionalizing Legal Defiance (2017–2020)

Between 2017 and 2020 Hungary moved from emergency measures toward an entrenched confrontation with EU institutions. In 2018 the government introduced the so-called *Stop Soros* legislative package, which criminalised assistance to asylum seekers and placed direct pressure on NGOs and legal aid providers (Hungarian Government, 2018). The Court of Justice of the European Union later found these measures incompatible with EU law (CJEU, 2021). Brussels launched infringement procedures in response, and the Court of Justice of the European Union delivered rulings in 2020 and 2021 declaring Hungary's practices incompatible with Union law (CJEU, 2020; 2021).

These judgments, however, did not lead to policy reversal. Hungary maintained its restrictive agenda and recast adverse EU rulings as illegitimate intrusions into sovereignty, presenting non-compliance as proof of resolve rather than liability (Gkliati, 2022; Prime Minister's Office, 2022). The Hungarian defiance was woven directly into domestic political theatre, as speeches and campaigns depicted Brussels as an overreaching outsider and used the slow pace of EU legal procedures to reinforce the claim of acting with a national mandate.

By 2020, the right to asylum at Hungary's borders had been hollowed out. Formal membership in the EU continued, along with the disputes before European courts, yet access to protection on the ground had nearly vanished. At the same time, the government's rhetoric grew more ideological. References to "population replacement," "cultural invasion," and the decline of Christian Europe became central motifs in Hungary's securitization discourse (Sukosd, 2022; Scott, 2023). This vocabulary echoed narratives circulating across European and American far-right discourse, anchoring the securitization agenda more

firmly in the state's governing framework (Lamour, 2023; Weninger, 2025). Taken together, these legal defiance strategies and ideological framings transformed migration from a policy challenge into a cornerstone of Hungary's sovereignty doctrine, fusing domestic politics with a broader post-liberal model of governance.

Domestic opposition did not vanish. Civil-society groups and legal aid organisations repeatedly litigated and documented practices at the border, winning CJEU rulings even if enforcement lagged. In parliament, opposition MPs increased the number of bills tabled in the 2018–2022 term, but their success rate remained below one percent, and procedural reforms curtailed scrutiny. Oversight instruments such as interpellations and committees of inquiry survived in form yet were blunted in practice, often neutralised by government majorities or even co-opted through “self-interpellation.” Resistance thus persisted, but it was structurally contained by the government's dominance and by the embedding of the sovereignty-first doctrine in law and administration (Tanács-Mandák, 2025).

3.3 Post-Ukraine Paradox and Selective Humanitarianism (2022–2023)

The war in Ukraine set a decisive test. Within months more than one million refugees crossed into Hungary, confronting a state that had long framed mass arrival as a civilisational threat. Officials and major outlets presented these arrivals in positive, proximate terms that matched a self-image of European, Christian, and culturally aligned populations (Vidra & Messing, 2025).

Brussels pressed for military and financial support to Kyiv while Hungary withheld arms and prioritised domestic energy security and bilateral channels with Moscow. Partners read this stance as obstruction inside the Union's crisis response (Czyż, 2024; European Parliament, 2022). The policy mix produced a clear pattern. Humanitarian assistance flowed where ethno-cultural proximity and geopolitical alignment could be claimed. Those outside that frame met systemic barriers. Pushbacks and the effective denial of protection persisted for asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2023). This conditionality carried institutional consequences. Hungary extended help while reaffirming a sovereignty filter that privileges national identity over universal asylum principles (Vidra & Messing, 2025). The approach exposed a wider weakness in EU migration governance, where formal commitments can be selectively implemented in ways that undercut supranational coherence (Gkliati, 2022).

Regionally, the war fractured earlier Visegrád alignment. Poland, Slovakia, and Czechia supplied military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Hungary held its line on neutrality and energy ties. Bloc cohesion thinned, yet the migration stance remained coordinated. Opposition to mandatory relocation endured, and flexible solidarity stayed in use as an organising frame (Czyż, 2024; Glied & Zamecki, 2021).

Taken together, the Ukraine episode crystallised the method. Humanitarian aid moved through an identity filter, alliance politics shifted with energy and war, and the migration line held. The doctrine proved adaptable and resistant to concession. Symbols were adjusted, core structures kept in place, and each crisis was used to validate sovereignty claims while exposing weaknesses in EU enforcement and coordination.

3.4 Migration Pact and 2025 Doctrinal Apex

In 2024–2025 the approach reached its clearest form. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum became the focal dispute. In the 2025 State of the Nation address, Orbán rejected the pact as demographic engineering and a direct threat to sovereignty (Orbán, 2025). The stance drew on a decade of legal reinterpretation, administrative slow-rolling, and regional messaging. Although Visegrád unity thinned after the war in Ukraine, Hungary kept the frame alive by centring “sovereignty” and “flexible solidarity” in regional language, with earlier joint statements as reference points (Visegrád Group, 2021; Czyż, 2024).

Border infrastructure expanded and upgraded in 2024 and early 2025. Surveillance systems multiplied, biometric screening became routine, and fencing was extended. These choices turned defence rhetoric into hardware and made migration control a visible claim to sovereign authority (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Khoury & Hendow, 2025; European Digital Rights et al., 2025).

By mid-2025, message control, legal resistance, and technological build-out operated as one system. Migration policy functioned as a tool of sovereign authority at home and as a workable playbook for resisting supranational constraints from inside the Union.

4. DISCUSSION

Between 2015 and 2025, migration policy in Hungary became a textbook case of securitization, and then moved beyond the classical model. An emergency response turned into a rule-making doctrine that reorganised institutions and external relations. Migration stopped being treated as a narrow social issue and became a lens for rewriting law, politics, and Hungary's place in Europe. The discussion traces four consequences: a threat narrative turned into durable rule; legal pushback that recast EU norms; border practices that built lasting symbols; and a regional spread of the model.

4.1 From Speech Act to Structural Doctrine

Within the Copenhagen School, securitization is the move that casts an issue as an existential threat that justifies exceptional measures (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Hungary's steps in 2015 fit that description. By 2025, the logic was embedded in statutes, media strategies, alliance choices, and surveillance systems organised around civilisational defence.

This path echoes Huysmans' account of "insecurity politics," where fear production stabilises authority (Huysmans, 2006). Migration became a flexible signifier that reinforced sovereignty, concentrated power, and sustained legitimacy. The story reduced politics to a choice between national autonomy and external imposition.

Critical work is a reminder that practice and infrastructure matter alongside speech (McDonald, 2008; Aradau & Blanke, 2010). In Hungary, biometrics, administrative filtering, and dense media cycles kept a sense of permanent risk in play. The operative goal was to re-engineer integration selectively in favour of sovereignty. Institutions stayed in place and, in many areas, intensified, but their normative direction tilted toward domestic control. In short, threat talk and structural redesign moved together to produce a security order built to outlast electoral time.

4.2 Strategic Non-Compliance and the Rewriting of EU Norms

Hungary shows how a member state can routinise non-compliance without leaving the Union. It resisted relocation quotas, stalled the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, and continued practices the CJEU found unlawful, exploiting weak EU enforcement in a field where implementation depends on national authorities and political will (Gkliati, 2022). Hungary's strategy performs formal alignment to preserve access to EU benefits while disabling unwanted rules in core state functions (Schimmelfennig, 2018). A simple contrast makes the stakes clear. Germany framed migration as a shared management problem requiring coordination, while Hungary cast it as a sovereignty test and converted Brussels' pushback into domestic legitimacy (Schammann et al., 2021).

In this field it is useful to distinguish two modes of defiance. Strategic non-compliance refers to deliberate and open rejection of EU law, exchanged for domestic political gain even when it brings legal or fiscal costs. Compliance minimalism refers to formal adherence to procedures and the letter of rules while neutralising their substance in practice. The former contests rules directly, the latter hollows them out.

The result in Hungary is compliance minimalism within a post-liberal governance mode: institutional forms persist while their normative content is redirected toward sovereignty consolidation (Lottholz, 2022). This method can be replicated, but only under specific conditions. It requires weak EU enforcement in a high-discretion field such as migration, long remedial timelines that allow domestic practices to entrench, sustained domestic demand for sovereignty-first framing, and access to regional coordination that normalises selective adherence. Where such conditions are absent, diffusion remains partial and outcomes converge toward symbolic alignment rather than structural change.

4.3 The Symbolic Border as Security Infrastructure

Hungary's border regime operates as deterrent and as stage. Fencing, surveillance systems, and biometric controls assemble into a security dispositif in Foucault's sense, a material and discursive apparatus that manufactures a durable perception of threat and organises conduct around it (Foucault, 2007). The continued upgrading long after peak arrivals signals priority for political symbolism over throughput management. The border's function is to show sovereignty at work.

Symbolic charge is produced through repetition and visibility. Camera towers, patrol footage, press events, and official briefings convert routine enforcement into a ritual of protection. Government-aligned outlets routinely link migration with crime, disease, and cultural decline, filling the information space with cues that justify constant vigilance (Sukosd, 2022). Image and hardware feed each other: the more the fence appears in public view, the more it reads as the source of order.

Technology then fixes the arrangement. Camera grids expand, biometric checks become routine, and layered barriers raise the procedural price of entry. Discretion at the edge narrows, decisions shift into technical systems, and what began as exception turns into daily administration. Unwinding the setup becomes costly once cameras, databases, and patrol rhythms are in place, whatever the level of arrivals (Human Rights Watch, 2025; Khoury & Hendow, 2025; European Digital Rights et al., 2025).

Security here works by regulating movement and sorting risk, not only by speech (Aradau & Blanke, 2010). Bodies are filtered, mobilities managed, and a civilisational defence is made tangible in steel and sensors. The result is a border order that both deters and performs, turning securitization from a claim into an institutional habit.

4.4 The Regional Export of the Hungarian Model

Visegrád gave the doctrine a regional route. Poland, Slovakia, and Czechia drew on its core elements: existential sovereignty framing and a firm refusal of binding relocation. The outcome was bloc resistance that strained supranational consensus. "Flexible solidarity" moved from slogan to operating principle. In core state domains such as security, borders, and migration, integration is especially vulnerable to rollback, and Hungary's approach tapped that vulnerability (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2014).

Transnational networks of think tanks, media hubs, and state-backed institutes helped the spread by normalising sovereignty-first politics and supplying channels for policy transfer (Coman et al., 2025). Hungary's stance exports a governance logic that institutionalises resistance from within EU procedures.

Notwithstanding, diffusion was uneven, and the war in Ukraine split earlier Visegrád alignment. Poland and Czechia adopted firm pro-Ukrainian positions, while Hungary mainly refused arms transfers and prioritised national interest (Czyż, 2024). The split confirms a post-liberal pattern. Symbolic coherence can persist while strategic alliances shift. Sovereignty-first governments preserve liberal veneers and recalibrate partnerships to fit domestic imperatives, sustaining the appearance of regional unity inside a reoriented order (Lottholz, 2022; Kim, 2023). Yet the Ukraine-era fracture has reduced the bandwidth for coordinated high-stakes action. Residual convergence on migration frames is likely to persist, but diminished political capital and divergent security priorities make a reprise of the 2015–2020 bloc-wide veto strategy far less certain.

4.5 Implications for Securitization and Integration Theory

The case pushes both sets of theory. In doing so, it also clarifies the distinction between the two compliance modes that shape the trajectory of internal disintegration. Strategic non-compliance contests EU rules openly, trading legal or fiscal costs for political gain at home. Compliance minimalism performs adherence to procedures and the letter of rules while neutralising their substance in practice. Together these modes explain how Hungary recalibrated integration from within. For securitization theory, the case shows how an initial speech act settles into an infrastructure of rule: claims travel into statutes, budgets, procurement, and routines, and security becomes an everyday operating system rather than a temporary exception (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2006). For integration, it lays out an internal

disintegration pathway: strategic non-compliance erodes a policy field while formal membership stays intact. Moreover, it specifies audience dynamics under conditions of repetition. Legitimacy is reproduced through cyclical rituals of boundary drawing and selective humanitarianism, which refresh consent without reopening first-order debates (McDonald, 2008; Aradau & Blanke, 2010; Balzacq & Guzzini, 2015).

The case extends integration theory further by formalising a disintegration mechanism that operates through practice rather than exit. Strategic non-compliance erodes a policy field by refusing enforcement, while compliance minimalism hollows out implementation. Administrative delay, legal reinterpretation, and coalition work inside the Council convert binding rules into optional guidance. This is differentiated disintegration by design rather than drift (Schimmelfennig, 2018). The enforcement gap in migration makes this strategy scalable, since implementation rests on national authorities with high discretion and uneven incentives (Gkliati, 2022).

Two additional concepts refine this picture. Governance hardening names the conversion of short-term emergency into durable institutional architecture. Compliance minimalism names the selective performance of EU duties that preserves access to benefits while filtering obligations. Taken together, they capture how sovereignty-first states recalibrate supranational authority from within, signalling adherence in form while shifting substance in practice.

These refinements carry testable propositions. Where security infrastructures expand and narrative cycles intensify, exceptional measures are likely to persist beyond the initiating shock. Where enforcement relies on national implementation and judicial timelines are slow, compliance minimalism will spread through policy emulation and bloc coordination. Where governments can trade symbolic alignment for procedural obstruction, internal disintegration will advance without formal opt-outs.

Placed in a wider frame, Hungary functions as a forerunner of post-liberal security governance. Sovereignty-first states retain the institutional shell of integration but redirect its content toward national closure while remaining inside common structures. The result is a Europe that appears integrated and works as a patchwork. This is the theoretical horizon that the case makes visible and actionable.

5. CONCLUSION

This article has traced how a set of crisis measures adopted in 2015 settled into Hungary's governing doctrine on migration. Over a decade, restrictive legislation, message discipline, and border practice combined into a single operating logic of sovereignty-first rule, as threat talk moved from podium lines to statutes, budget lines, procurement decisions, and routine administration. EU membership continued, yet participation increasingly took shape on Hungary's terms.

Three empirical outcomes stand out. First, securitization became embedded in everyday state machinery, shaping laws, funding choices, and bureaucratic routines rather than appearing only in moments of exception. Second, legal resistance hardened into method: adverse rulings were absorbed without meaningful reversal, while compliance was curated to preserve access to EU benefits and filter obligations. Third, borders were turned into visible instruments of authority, as fencing, surveillance networks, and biometric checks built a material and symbolic architecture that is costly to unwind.

The regional dimension amplified these dynamics. Through the Visegrád channel, Budapest helped move "flexible solidarity" from slogan to operating principle. Further, the war in Ukraine then exposed the limits of bloc cohesion, with Poland and Czechia adopting clear pro-Ukrainian positions while Hungary maintained a narrow sovereignty line on aid and energy. That fracture, however, did not erase earlier convergence on migration, which is analytically revealing: post-liberal governance adapts to shifting geopolitics while preserving its institutional shell, allowing a measure of symbolic coherence to survive even as alliances shift.

Conceptually, the paper identifies two travelling mechanisms organising this story over a decade. Governance hardening captures the conversion of emergency tools into stable institutional architecture and compliance minimalism captures the selective performance of EU obligations that maintains the form of adherence while shifting substance in practice. Taken together, these mechanisms explain how threat politics endures and how integration can be trimmed from within without formal opt-outs.

Theoretically, the Hungarian decade pushes securitization analysis beyond the initiating speech act toward the infrastructures, media ecologies, and administrative routines that keep threat governance running. For integration theory, it details an internal disintegration track that operates through delay, reinterpretation, and coalition work inside EU procedures, yielding a pattern of differentiated disintegration pursued as strategy rather than drift. The resulting picture is of a Europe that appears integrated yet operates as a patchwork.

Methodologically, a critical, theory-oriented case study can do more than illustrate. By triangulating legal texts, government communication, media output, and regional statements, the analysis shows where and how a doctrine settles and offers a template for tracing similar moves in other high-discretion, thin-enforcement domains.

Policy implications follow. If EU rules are to bind, enforcement must be felt at the point of implementation, not deferred to courts alone. Monitoring should cover practices and infrastructures as well as formal transposition, because technologies and routines quietly reshape the application of rules. Border management systems require sustained oversight so that biometric and surveillance infrastructures do not set de facto terms of governance. Regional coordination should anticipate shifting alignments and invest in issue-specific coalitions capable of sustaining policy through geopolitical shocks.

Limits remain and call for caution in generalization. Hungary is a forerunner rather than a universal template, and national histories and institutional legacies shape how doctrines take root. Future work should test the reach of governance hardening and compliance minimalism across other EU member states and across adjacent policy fields such as policing, digital regulation, or public health, while close study of how officials and media actors sustain doctrines in daily practice would deepen understanding of persistence and change.

Looking beyond 2025, three tensions are likely to steer the doctrine's trajectory. Technology-led hardening at the border will continue as biometric and surveillance systems expand, embedding sovereignty claims in infrastructure. Judicial-administrative frictions will persist as additional adverse rulings meet entrenched practice, renewing clashes between legal principle and political authority. Shifting regional alignments may lower the collective payoff from coordinated defiance even as a measure of symbolic convergence endures. None of these dynamics points to simple reversal; together they imply path-dependent persistence punctuated by periodic recalibration.

The core finding stands; between 2015 and 2025, Hungary turned migration into the primary arena where sovereignty is asserted at home and negotiated with Europe. The doctrine endures because it is inscribed in law, infrastructure, and routine, and, seen through the paired mechanisms of governance hardening and compliance minimalism, it offers a script that others can adapt where conditions permit. If widely emulated, this script would entrench fragmentation as a structural condition of the Union, with migration as the decisive site where sovereignty and integration collide.

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