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Football Crowds, Protestors, and Visions of Transnational (Dis)order on the EU Level

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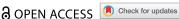
ABSTRACT

By pulling together debates in the sociology of risk, (in)security and social movement studies concerning how social groups viewed as deviant, potentially "troublesome," "risky", or "disorderly" are responded to and defined as "security issues," this article develops an analysis of EU institutions' responses to football crowd violence and their expansion into the transnational protest field. The article argues that EU's involvement in the fields of football crowds and protest is not solely a case of transnational diffusion. What is revealed, from the mid-1990s onwards is a concretization of EU institutions' securitization of transnationally mobile and potentially "disorderly" social groups operating across European public spaces.

Introduction

The ways in which protest is politically and legally responded to remain important entry points for understandings of the maintenance and reorganization of state power (Cristiano et al. 2023; Fritsch and Kretschmann 2021). Crucially, it can provide a glimpse of how social groups, challenging the power of the state (della Porta and Zamponi 2013), become constructed as deviant, or even framed and considered a *security problem* in contemporary societies (Fritsch and Kretschmann 2021). Drawing together insights from critical security studies, the sociology of risk and social movement studies, this article advances an understanding of how European Union (EU) policy frameworks – developed to control the threat of deviant behavior and football crowd disorder (Grodecki and Rookwood 2025; Tsoukala 2009) – have conceptually migrated into the field of transnational protest, and concurrently reveals a concretization of EU institutions' securitization of transnational urban disorder.

Whilst extant literature establishes that the "international normative systems developed in relation to perceived emergencies such as football hooliganism [. . .] is now associated with the policing of transnational protest"; that such systems often have given limited protection to civil liberties including demonstration rights (della Porta and Reiter 2006:187–188); and, that this transnational exportation is mentioned in preexisting studies (della Porta and Tarrow 2012; della Porta and Zamponi 2013; Reiter and Fillieule 2006), it can be argued that the position of EU's approach to football-related violence and disorder is rarely unpacked at a detailed level (exceptions include Mojet 2005; Tsoukala 2009, 2018) despite its apparent, formative importance for how certain protests or social movements have been securitized. Central here are the EU and its institutions' roles as what della Porta and Tarrow (2012:139) call "certifying agencies" that have legitimized "the new forms of policing through their endorsement," contributing to their "transnational diffusion." This must be viewed in context of wider transnational trends whereby the policing of protest no longer is merely a national

security matter, but a "concern of supranational entities such as the European Union" (Krøijer 2013:35). Notwithstanding, in social movement studies, the formative position of the EU's approach to football-related violence is, more often than not, mentioned only in passing, despite the persistency and longevity of football-related violence as a social issue (Grodecki and Rookwood 2025).

However, to examine how the EU's regulatory frameworks *vis-à-vis* what Tsoukala (2009) calls "counter-hooliganism" has had a prompting effect on, and influenced what this article sees as a wider securitization of transnational urban disorder in Europe, it becomes necessary to zoom out. Commonly, studies on the "repression" or "policing" of football crowds (Pearson and Stott 2022) and protest (Gorringe et al. 2024) have focused on the "on-the-ground" policing styles, including the tactical measures and stances deployed against the relevant crowds of football supporters, protestors, and activists. Whilst empirically documenting these micro-interactions and dynamics, often captured ethnographically, remains crucial, such research cannot necessarily account for the wider, *macro* contexts that give life to political and legal regulatory frameworks, nor *historicize* conceptions of security (cf. Bigo 2024), and their influence on present-day societies, where public order conflict remains at the forefront of European political and policy agendas (Roach and Thomaneck 2023). By its commitment to *zooming out* (see Lee Ludvigsen 2025a), this article echoes extant, yet separately forwarded arguments. First, Kienscherf (2016:1186) argues for the critical recognition of broader social control contexts, observing that "[s]ocial movement scholars have rarely situated protest policing in the wider context of social control." Further, Oliver (2008:4) suggests that social movement studies consistently have "misse[d] the connection between crime-control and movement-control." Second – quite similarly – but regarding football crowds, Tsoukala (2009:9) argues convincingly that the policing of football supporters must be situated against wider developments within the security field and the "current configuration of the political and security fields within which the security officials under examination are operating in."

In an epoch of globalized risk management (Beck 1999) where traditional categories of "internal" and "external" security have merged in a Möbius strip-*esque* manner (Bigo 2000), zooming out permits the unpacking of wider questions of how urban, potentially "troublesome" and "disorderly" behaviors – that are collective and transnational in nature – have been politically constructed into a security issue on the EU level (Krøijer 2013), and how, often without public discussion, security mechanisms or logics introduced for sporting events migrate to other spheres of public life (Divišová 2019). Proceeding on the basis that the current securitization of transnational protest has been conceptually and discursively influenced by, and in conversation with the policing of football crowds in Europe, reconsidering the EU's approach to, and regulation of football crowd violence allows us to place current configurations in a wider context of control, risk, and security whilst concurrently committing to the production of what Bigo (2024) conceptualized as a *genealogy of security*, oriented toward "historicis[ing] the notion of security in order to understand these recent transformations" (p. 85).

This paper aims to examine and reconsider EU approaches to (in)security in European football, which emerged throughout the 1980s, but accelerated in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, and these approaches' exportation onto the field of transnational protest aided by EU institutions' role as a "certifying" actors (della Porta and Tarrow 2012). By bringing together three research trajectories within the sociology of risk, social movement studies, and critical security studies, this article advances an understanding of how the EU's regulation of football crowds, and its potentially deviant and disorderly behaviors – and these regulations' interactions with the field of transnational protest – have meant that, even if peaceful, football supporters and protestors can still be categorized as a security problem (e.g., "potentially troublesome"), whilst this represents a quintessential securitization of transnational mobile and urban disorder.

Theoretical backdrop: transnational risk and the blurring of internal/external security

This section draws together theoretical insights from the sociology of risk and critical security studies to understand the transnationalization of risk (and its management) and the blurry lines between "internal" and "external" security, located within a globalization discourse. Following della Porta and Tarrow (2012:144), the transnational diffusion of protest behavior and policing practices are largely a result of globalizing forces, especially the "growth of transnational ties" among both governing elites and transnational activists alike. To theorize these transnational *ties* further, it serves as constructive to first turn toward Ulrich Beck's social theory.

Beck (1999) observed a society increasingly characterized by (global) risk (e.g., climate change, terrorism, financial crashes) and its institutional and individual management. With new, man-made risks – powered by modernity's technological and scientific progress – operating increasingly across the nation-state's borders, these new risks' universality, uncontrollability, and potentially damaging nature have, subsequently, undermined political and security institutions' traditional authority (Mythen and Walklate 2016).

Yet, Beck's risk society also became a platform for extensions into the study of globalization (Mythen and Walklate 2016). For Beck (2008), new forms of global interrelatedness and interdependence, in turn, resulted in the emergence of supranational organizations. This diffused the power once held firmly by the nation-state. In this context, questions about who can precautionary define risk also become contested, and Beck's (2008:8) "relations of definitions" surface as important, referring to "the rules, institutions and capabilities which specify how risks are to be identified in particular contexts (for example, within nation-states, but also in relations between them)." Under such conditions, where relations of definition remain contested between expert systems and publics – Beck (2008:798) saw supranational, international organizations, NGOs, and social movements as cosmopolitan actors, "contributing to the diversity of forms of regulation, to the variety of settings for rule creation, and to the proliferation of methods of interpretation and application of norms and standards." It hence becomes apparent how *transnational risks* require *transnational solutions* (even when solutions are hard, even ontologically impossible, to produce). This "world made up of flows and networks rather than boundaries and fixed points" (Loader 2002:126), subsequently, has blurred the once distinct lines between the *global/local* and *national/transnational* (Beck 2000).

Arguably, this logic presents certain important synergies with Bigo, who pioneered an international political sociological approach to questions of (in)security. At the start of the millennium, Bigo (2000), like Beck, analyzed "the transnational" as having a blurring effect upon the European internal/external distinction, reconfiguring concepts of sovereignty and security. External security actors (e.g., the army) and internal actors (e.g., the police) began to address the *same* non-traditional threats to security, including drug trafficking, terrorism, and hooliganism to name a few, given these threats' cross-border nature, which, again, demonstrated the attempts to control the "transnational movement of persons" (Bigo 2006). Consequently, a web of actors, individuals, and institutions holding distinct amounts of capital, legitimacy, and agendas (Skleparis 2016) became entangled in the same security fields, that are characterized by struggles over the "boundaries and the definition of the term 'security,' and over the prioritization of different threats as well as the definition of what is not a threat but only a risk or even an opportunity" (Bigo 2006:394).

These trends have contributed to making policing activities "more extensive" (Bigo 2008) and molded by institutions networked beyond national borders:

> These "policing" activities, in particular those devoted to surveillance and maintenance of public order, now take place at a distance, beyond national borders, as for example with detective experts of hooligans in international football matches, or for anti-globalization protest and demonstrations. (Bigo 2008:15)

In an epoch of transnational risk, it is apparent how international football matches, protests, and demonstrations are outlined by Bigo as the *new* type of security threats, constituting potential sites for "public order" breaches and transnational, (often) urban movements of crowds.

To capture the dynamics lying beneath these activities, the two unpacked theoretical perspectives appear extremely relevant and can operate as a synthesized theoretical filter through which we examine how football crowd disorder and violence have been managed on the EU level, with its developed systems interacting with and reaching other fields, including those of demonstrations and protest. Skleparis (2016:95) has, indeed, contended that "[t]he concept of risk plays a key role in the (in)securitization theoretical framework." And, as argued here, utilizing the analytical relations located within the two frameworks enable an understanding of how social groups or phenomenon are defined as "risky" or a "security issue" from the top-down by relevant expert institutions, systems, and professionals.

To examine this, this paper's adopted approach reflects Bigo's (2024) recent call for scholars to produce genealogies of security. Expanding on the Foucauldian notion of genealogical approaches, Bigo contends that such research, seeking to historicize security, becomes an "indispensable first step in overcoming the contemporary doxa of security" (p. 85). Applied to this paper, this means that by seeking to understand current configurations in the securitization of protests and social movements, whereby the EU is considered a "certifying agent" (della Porta and Tarrow 2012), such a genealogy of contemporary (in)securitization practices requires scholars to *look back* and historicize those processes leading to the present-day. As mentioned, the securitization of football crowds in Europe is commonly mentioned regarding its generating role, and *connection* to the fields of social movements and protest (della Porta and Tarrow 2012; Reiter and Fillieule 2006). Indeed, della Porta and Tarrow (2012:141) maintain that the "practices that the European police developed in dealing with gangs and soccer hooligans have sometimes been extended to protesters." Yet, whilst this suggests *where* to look or begin – for understandings of current security *doxas* – this does not, in detail, historicize nor analyze *how* the practices first emerged in European football's context.

As argued, these linkages are rarely unpacked in great detail, nor subjected to a genealogy of security that "reveal[s] something important – but hidden – in our contemporary experience" (Garland 2014:368). Hence, the next section addresses the ways in which EU and its institutions came to enter what Tsoukala (2009) called the "counter-hooligan" field. This remains politically and sociologically important since it reveals how the EU started to deal with the risk of football crowds in Europe through a set of policies and practices that have formulated a security *dispositif* that not only is likely to be exported into new contexts, but be "normalized both inside and beyond the EU" (Tsoukala 2018:156). Although the EU's engagement with football crowd issues reached its zenith in the mid-1990s and early 00s, this can still be seen as lying beneath the present-day configuration wherein public (dis)order and protest have "moved into the foreground of political debates and policy" across Europe (Roach and Thomaneck 2023:1).

The EU's entrance into "counter-hooligan" field

From the national to transnational frames (1985–1997)

As Grodecki and Rookwood (2025:1) write, football fixtures and tournaments have, for long, constituted "designated cultural space that offered opportunities for the transgression of everyday norms, including greater permission for and acceptance of violence." Football-related violence has, therefore, "stirred up an ever-increasing specific regulatory frame both at European and EU level" (Tsoukala 2018:139). Notwithstanding, compared to the EU's involvement in addressing other securitized issues, including terrorism, organized crime and migration (Bigo 2008; Huysmans 2000), this paper contends that analyses of these "ever-increasing" regulatory frameworks aimed at football crowds have been granted limited academic discussion, with exception of Tsoukala (2009, 2018), Mojet (2005) and Lee Ludvigsen (2025b). This has obstructed an even more comparative study – which remains pressing given the EU's "ever-increasing" activities and the fact that these security policies were developed in the *absence* of academic or (national, European, or EU) legal definitions of the phenomenon to be controlled: "hooliganism" (Tsoukala 2009). Drawing upon policy documents, legal texts, and extant

literatures, this section unpacks the entrance and increasingly hegemonic role (from the mid-1990s onwards) of the EU in the management of risk and (in)security in European football. However, consequently one key task becomes to briefly contextualize the issue of football crowd disorder and violence (often labeled "hooliganism") and the existing structures of transnational coordination prior to the EU's entrance into this realm.

Since the 1970s, the organization of consumption of European football competitions meant that supporters, increasingly, have traveled across borders to attend fixtures (King 2003). Thus, any institutional attempts to control supporters and potential disorder or violence must, in European football's case, be analyzed in light of its transnational nature (Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala 2016). Disorderly and violent football crowd behaviors have since the late 19th century represented a public order problem in European countries. Yet from the 1960s and onwards, the phenomenon became subject to increased media coverage and academic attention, alongside the growing perception that the violent section of football supporter cultures had become increasingly problematic (Grodecki and Rookwood 2025; King 2003; Tsoukala 2009). At this point, though, legal and preventative responses to curb violence were enacted on local and national levels. This is explained by the fact that authorities considered "football hooliganism" a public order problem that could be addressed through extant, national legislations and policing strategies (Tsoukala 2009). And, aside from Union of European Football Associations' (UEFA)[1] binding safety and security regulations, any other attempts to supranationally regulate the risk and (in)security of football crowds did not emerge until the 1980s – specifically, following the 1985 Heysel stadium disaster which caused 39 deaths, and became a turning point whereby the reactive moment and responses of European organization led to forthcoming epochs defined by pro-activeness (Tsoukala 2007).

Not only did the tragedy underline the need for adequate and structurally safe stadiums in Europe, but it ushered responses from European organizations that accelerated a new era of controlling "football hooliganism" with Heysel serving to legitimize the "seriousness of the security threat policy makers had to deal with" (Tsoukala 2018:140–1). However, the supranational response did not come from EU initially. Instead, it was the Council of Europe that, shortly after Heysel, adopted the 1985 *European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches*. [2] This Convention paved the way for new mechanisms of international cooperation to prevent violence and quickly impacted domestic and international policies, although the Convention's target population set a vague scope, targeting both "*known*" and "*potential* trouble-makers" (Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala 2016). Reflecting the wider societal preoccupation with precautionary anticipations of risk (Beck 2008), this quickly saw football supporters subjected to enhanced surveillance mechanisms and "banning orders" (Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala 2016) that, if applied, prevented fans from attending stadiums – contributing to football supporters becoming one of the most surveilled social groups in postwar liberal states (Tsoukala 2009).

Stretching out the post-Heysel moment's political significance, we first observe an erosion of (traditional) distinction between the *national* and *European* (cf. Beck 2000). Accordingly, and second, we observe that the now transnational security issue of football-related disorder and violence increasingly appeared on the EU agenda (Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala 2016). However, the EU's arrival in the "counter-hooligan" field was also influenced by institutional developments. As Reiter and Fillieule (2006):148) recount, the 1970s and 80s had already seen growing EU-driven transnational policing collaborations – assisted by the EU's broadened competencies and commitment to the production of an area of "freedom, security and justice." The signing of the Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1997) treaties also significantly boosted inter-governmental cooperation in the EU, whereby the former introduced EU competencies in the field of justice and home affairs (Loader 2002).

Hence, previously informal mechanisms of cooperation became formalized into a more coherent approach to public order policing in the second part of the 1990s (Reiter and Fillieule 2006). Here, it is significant that della Porta and Reiter (2006:99) maintain that "European cooperation in the field of public order first concentrated on football hooliganism, subsequently extending to other public order

problems." This paper echoes yet *extends* and *refines* this proposition, arguing that the case of risk and (in)security in European football must not merely be seen as an EU "testing ground" for other fields, but that it essentially, by this virtue, *accelerated the wider EU securitization of transnational, urban disorder.*

Expanding the scope: cooperation, "risk fans" and handbooks (1997–2015)

One EU-specific landmark *vis-à-vis* the securitization of (potential) urban disorder as a transnational phenomenon was the binding, Joint Action from 26 May 1997 regarding cooperation on law and order and security. This was passed by the European Council without consultation with the European Parliament and, importantly, extended a recommendation from 1996 on the prevention of disorder in relation to football matches to now also include a range of other potential public order issues with football events only constituting *one* of these (della Porta and and Reiter 2006; Tsoukala 2007). The Joint Action's significance was demonstrated by how it:

> mainly provide[d] for the collection, analysis and exchange of information on all sizeable groups that may pose a threat to law, order and security when travelling to another member state to participate in a meeting attended by large numbers of persons from more than one member state. For this purpose, it stipulate[d] that the cooperation between law enforcement agencies should be further reinforced by the creation of an EU-wide pool of liaison officers (Tsoukala 2007:12–13)

Therefore, if this Joint Action is understood as a wider framework securitizing transnational, urban disorder, it remains significant that it grew from the EU's fight against "hooliganism" which the Council of the EU (1997, emphasis added) itself acknowledged, stating that: "further to previous initiatives, *particularly as regards football hooliganism*, efforts should be made to extend and strengthen cooperation on law and order and security." Ultimately, the widened bundling together of various urban occasions – characterized by transnational mobilities and potential disorder – was also enabled by the Joint Action's reference to the word "meeting" (Tsoukala 2009), exemplified by "sporting events, rock concerts, demonstrations and road-blocking protest campaigns" (Council of the EU 1997). These "potentially threatening collective behaviours" (Tsoukala 2009:106), in turn, became *events* that member states were encouraged to share information with each other prior to, relating to "sizeable groups which may pose a threat to law and order and security are travelling to another Member State in order to participate in events" (Council of the EU 1997).

In 1999, the Council of the EU adopted a (non-binding) resolution concerning a handbook for international police cooperation and measures to prevent and control violence and disturbances related to international football matches (Mojet 2005). Referred to as the "EU Football Handbook," and later replaced by Council Resolutions in 2001, 2006, 2010, and 2016, it can be argued that these resolutions not solely reaffirmed the position of football crowd disorder and violence as a transnationally significant phenomenon on the EU security agenda, specifically, in light of the EU's objective speaking to "provid[ing] citizens with a high level of safety within an area of freedom, security and justice" (Council of the EU 2016:2), but the handbook must also be analyzed within a wider frame of international cooperation between member states (Loader 2002) as a top-down attempt to harmonize the policing of football crowds (Tsoukala 2018).

Precisely demonstrating the institutional emphasis on fostering information exchanges, the 2001 handbook, also encouraged Member States to establish so-called national football information points, tasked specifically with the exchange of information and facilitation of cross-country collaboration prior to internationally significant football fixtures (Mojet 2005; Tsoukala 2009). By defining who the target population for these measures were – namely, the risk of "individuals who represent or may represent a danger to public order or to security in connection with the event or who may have been involved in incidents" (Council of the EU 2001:3), the information to be provided predominantly centered around "the composition, behaviour and travel flows of supporters prior to, during and after international football matches" (Spaaij 2013:176). The EU's expansion into the control of deviant

behaviors therefore became increasingly apparent, especially due to these information points' role in the collection of personal data "not only on high-risk supporters [. . .] but also on those associated with lower risk," as aided by the European Council's decision in 2006 concerning security in connection with football matches with an international dimension (Tsoukala 2007:15).

At this stage, the categorization of individuals according to *higher* and *lower* risk also presented a significant development *paralleling* the drive toward enhanced transnational flows of information (Spaaij 2013). Indeed, the 2006 iteration of the "EU Football Handbook," set out, through an EU-wide "common definition" (Pearson and Stott 2022), whom the EU ultimately saw as security issues in European football's context, distinguishing this time binarily between "risk" and "non-risk" supporters. Now, the target population constituted "risk supporters," defined as:

> A person, known or not, who can be regarded as posing a possible risk to public order or antisocial behaviour, whether planned or spontaneous, at or in connection with a football event. (Council of the EU 2006:18)

Various critiques of this definition's vagueness have interrogated its lack of specifications regarding "what behaviour may be considered antisocial" (Tsoukala 2018:146) and its "absurd," "binary, clumsy, [and] grammatically confusing" nature *vis-à-vis* the failure to contextualize the culture surrounding football fandom – where practices easily deemed "anti-social" like chanting or drinking are common-place even among many "non-risk" supporters (Pearson and Stott 2022:147), yet often contextually normalized (Pearson 2018); creating a situation, in turn, where many "non-risk" supporters could easily be viewed as a "possible risk." The label of "risk supporter," once attached to an individual, also meant that there could be infringements on their civil rights and liberties, including enhanced surveillance, collection of personal data, or restrictions on their movements (Spaaij 2013). Yet, there is a wider point here resonating with the frames from Bigo (2006) and Beck (2008) speaking to the *definition* of risk and security.

Bigo (2006) observed the construction of (in)security through the struggles for power to define what a security threat and risk is, and how specific actors "now has [their] say in the definition of threats and their prioritisation" (p. 395). Beck (2008:8) referred to those institutions that "specify how risks are to be identified." The "risk supporter" definition when enacted on EU level remains significant in the wider securitization of transnational, urban disorder – as a top-down attempt to proactively *control the uncontrollable* but, in doing so, rendering the public spaces and their "order" subjected to insecurity as "potentially dangerous spaces, locations, situations and populations, while no longer necessarily differentiating between legal and illegal behavior[s]" (Fritsch and Kretschmann 2021:22). "Risk supporters", thus, were not only deemed directly, by the EU-wide definition, as "risky" to football stadiums and crowds but symbolized a larger, urban, transnational, and collective security issue given its *possible* incompatibility with "ordered" public spaces and behaviors.

Tendencies of "de-securitization" and an institutionalization of dialogue (2016–2024)

Whilst the "Football Handbook's" 2016 iteration conserved the risk/non-risk categorization, recent years have seen some tendencies of "de-securitization" occur on the EU level. Especially as "ordinary" supporters seemingly have acquired a more central role in EU "counter-hooligan" policy (Tsoukala 2018). Consistent with the principles of the Council of Europe's updated Convention opened 2016 on an "*Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events*", the 2016 "EU Football Handbook" emphasized cooperation with supporters and the importance of dialogue with supporters, highlighting that "[t]his approach has been shown to help promote self-policing amongst supporters and facilitate early and appropriate intervention when security problems or risks emerge" (Council of the EU 2016:16).

As a result, an "institutionalization of dialogue" (Lee Ludvigsen 2025b) *co-exists* with the conserved "institutionalization of the control of deviance" which Tsoukala (2009) theorized in the late 2000s. In 2022, the Council of the EU also adopted a resolution on good practice guidance in respect of police liaison with Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs). This was the seventeenth document adopted by the EU

regarding football security and safety issues, and sought to enhance the legitimacy of the SLO, which is required by UEFA's guidelines, and is an individual hired by a club to act as a bridge between football clubs, the police, stewards, and the fans (Lee Ludvigsen). However, whilst this *prima facie* seems a progressive outcome, since the SLO role (formally) was implemented earlier (in 2012) following pressure from fan activists across Europe championing greater fan engagement, a cautious view is still required. Not only do some supporters in Europe feel that the SLO represents an overly formalized, top-down policy that serves the clubs, the police or UEFA, but this element of "de-securitization" from the level of political authorities (Numerato 2018) must not as Tsoukala (2018:155) warns, distract us from the fact that supporters, for four decades, have been "embedded in a frame of action that has not managed to maintain law and order without jeopardizing their civil rights and liberties." Because, despite the closer gap between football and political authorities and *some* supporters, who possess access to the policy corridors through the recognition of some fan organizations as dialogue partners (Lee Ludvigsen 2025b), the EU's "counter-hooliganism" policy can still be seen as reliant upon three axes – evolving across four decades – consisting of surveillance, exclusion and banning orders, and harmonization (Tsoukala 2018).

The recent appreciation of "fan engagement" on the EU level (similarly detectable from Council of Europe and UEFA) (Lee Ludvigsen), therefore, only exists alongside a framework that for decades defined supporters as deviant (Turner 2023), and (vaguely) as risks to another (vaguely) defined "order," and which continues to encourage harmonization in the face of football crowds characterized by national variations. Football supporters, as argued here, and as next section builds on, is still entangled in a wider continuum of contemporary security threats in the EU, that traverses transnational and urban spaces – where the lines between "good" or "bad," or "ordinary" or "risk" supporter (or protestors, for that sake), are blurry, and where "security" becomes envisioned – as Krøijer (2013: 34) puts it so eloquently – as "a perfect state of law and order that must be maintained and extended into the future, where risks and imminent threats personified by 'violent travelling offenders' and 'troublemakers' lurk." Yet, the social and political significance of this is underpinned by how these logics, as argued, largely *emerged* from the football context before they spread.

Interaction with the protest field and its implications: the securitization of transnational urban disorder

As demonstrated, the Joint Action from 1997 both followed on from, and crystallized EU "counter-hooliganism" initiatives. While the security issue of European football was increasingly defined throughout the 1980s and 90s, the early 2000 saw the emergence of a new issue that, similarly to football crowds, was characterized by its transnational and often urban nature. It is possible to understand transnational protest as "protests that mainly address international targets and involve a substantive number of protesters from different countries" (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012:126). Following the global wave of anti-corporate protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Crossley 2002), and the 2000 Prague World Bank Summit and the 2001 "Summer of Resistance" – characterized by clashes and disorder at the EU summit in Gothenburg and a G8 meeting in Genoa, transnational protest, often relating to summits and counter-summits and anti-corporate struggles, European authorities were now increasingly alarmed and saw the need to respond quickly to address this issue (Krøijer 2013; Crossley 2002) following the enhanced media scrutiny on the policing of protest (Della et al. 2012). Acknowledging that it is not this section's intention to unpack every step in the EU approach to transnational protest (for this, see Reiter and Fillieule 2006; Krøijer 2013), the consequences of the emerging issue demonstrate clear patterns of continuities warranting discussion, because it saw the arrival of "new," specific measures in the protest field, "[c]entered on information exchange and geared towards proactive policing" while concurrently bringing about issues speaking to transparency, efficiency and democratic accountability (Reiter and Fillieule 2006:158).

It has been contended that the repertoires of protestors and the police alike have diffused transnationally through interaction with one another (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012). Likewise, this

article unpacked earlier how security assemblages also spread transnationally in parallel with the evolution of football supporter cultures – notably, the regularization of supporters traveling cross-border to attend European club competitions, international fixtures, and tournaments (King 2003). Yet, repertoires have also been influenced by interactions and diffusions between the football and protest fields which, in themselves, have hinged upon the evident overlaps between the two fields, involving collective behaviors and phenomena, and "through the theorization of underlying similarity between gangs and soccer hooligans and protesters" (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012:140–41). Notwithstanding, beyond this, it is argued here that it is not solely this diffusive interaction that remains socially significant: the bigger picture reveals a wider EU-led attempt – a successful one – to politically construct potential urban disorder, occurring on a transnational scale, into a *security* problem. As contended, this has meant that it was not only the immediate security issue *at* European football or transnational protest (e.g., the risk to public order on the day of a football fixture or a protest) that was constructed into a problem, but the security problem *of* the two: to an envisioned idea of maintained "order" internally within the EU (cf. Bigo 2000).

Krøijer (2013) notes that in the early and mid-2000s, the EU published two security handbooks relating to major international events (in 2001 and 2006). These contained lessons on the maintenance of security and public order, and covered topics such as risk analysis, "the exchange of intelligence prior to a summit event, operational and tactical planning, technical solutions to control crowds, fencing and zoning" (p. 35). In 2002, the "Security Handbook for the Use of Police Authorities and Services at International Events such as meetings of the European Council" was issued at EU level after being requested by the EU Council for Security and Justice. Whilst resonating with those "risk" grammars and logics seen in the case of football, this text provided guidelines on how to enable international collaboration and information-exchange (Della et al. 2012). Moreover, it stated that permanent national contact points – resembling those aforementioned national football information points – must be established to provide risk assessments and analysis speaking to "known potential demonstrators and other groupings expected to travel to the event and deemed to pose a potential threat to the maintenance of public law and order" (quoted in Reiter and Fillieule (2006:164). In light of the handbooks, and affirming the latent significance of the 1997 Joint Action, a number of new – yet previously seen – concepts, logics, and measures "arrived" in the transnational protest field. For example, this included the use of "spotters," often used in football policing (Pearson and Stott 2022), tasked with "identify[ing] persons or groups from their countries likely to pose a threat to public order and security" (Reiter and Fillieule 2006:159). Emerging measures also included cross-country data banks and information exchange between states seeking to prevent individuals deemed a risk to the public order from partaking in protest (Della Porta 2013). The rise of coercive and preemptive policies prior to protests, not seeking necessarily to only protect the political summits, but instead targeting social movements and activists, in turn, revealed the extension of already opaque strategies *vis-à-vis* their commitment to and protection of citizens' rights (Della Porta 2013). While the absent definition of "hooliganism" and pro-active policing methods, and vague grounds of banning orders had confirmed the growing erosion of football supporters' civil rights in European football (Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala 2016), the EU approach toward transnational protest, similarly, was characterized by vagueness: it proceeded in the absence of "checks and balances that enables[d] the restriction of protester rights" (Reiter and Fillieule 2006:172).

Crucially, therefore, the streamlining of knowledge-transfer and definitions set out by the EU's frameworks (and their diffusion) in the fields of protest and football crowds alike only reveals one part of a story. The attention of the EU policymakers, essentially, was also set on "the capacity to *look ahead so as to foresee new threats* and develop technical ways to address them" (Krøijer 2011: 36, emphasis added). As this article argues, the conceptual subscription to this future-oriented outlook – concerned with "*how to feign control over the uncontrollable*" (Beck 2002:41, original emphasis) – concurrently reveals the EU's power to specify how transnational risk – here, in form of *potentially* disorderly behaviors *that have not occurred yet* – should be identified, and policies enacted based on risk-based grammars (cf. Beck 1999, 2008). The above discussion also reveals

how this has enabled the definition of so-called "risk-groups" (e.g., "risk-fans," "troublemakers," "bad" protestors), from the national to European level, that are consequently put under enhanced surveillance and control (cf. Bigo 2000).

It is, within a wider deterritorialization frame, possible to understand these attempts to police transnational football and protest "at a distance" (Bigo 2006, 2008) with policing activities "in particular those devoted to surveillance and maintenance of public order [e.g., for international football matches or anti-globalization protest], now tak[ing] place at a distance, beyond national borders" (Bigo 2008:15) with the transnational movement of supporters and protesters, envisioned as collective, mobile, transnational actors assembling in European cities for football fixtures, international tournaments, counter-summits or protests, seen as collectively making up a bundled-together threat to EU's idea of "public order," whereby the responses demonstrate a merger what was once "internal" and "external" security (Bigo 2000).

This article argues that it is necessary to analyze the *interactions* between EU "counter-hooligan" policy (Tsoukala 2009) and approaches to transnational protest (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012) as *something more* than a case of transporting models or configurations from one field to another – which scholars of social movements have highlighted (Della Porta 2013; Della Porta and Tarrow 2012 Reiter and Fillieule 2006). Whilst European football crowds, undeniably, have often figured as a "experimentation site" for novel security measures (see Divišová 2019) and that the political significance of this socio-spatial experimentation cannot be downplayed; zooming out to capture the wider social control context (Kienscherf 2016), and historicizing this present continuum, allows for an observation of what, arguably, composes a quintessential securitization accelerated by EU policies, of phenomena that, while transient, is by nature collective, mobile and fluid, crowded, and transnational.

Assisted the precautionary turns in risk societies (Beck 1999), where the societal level is characterized by "a state of perceived overall insecurity, especially with regard to public space" (Fritsch and Kretschmann 2021:22), the mid-1990s onwards paved way for a situation where supporters and protestors – albeit composing categories made up by diverse social groups – could be more easily categorized as security *issues* or *problems* to the same idea of "public order" and where their civil liberties and human rights, in many cases, were eroded by the lack of democratic and public discussion around the extent to which mechanisms policing them – be it intelligence-gathering, surveillance, the continued desire for "larger and deeper cooperation" (Bigo 2016:91), or measures like banning orders – were "*effective*" or "*work*", when juxtaposed to the overarching aim of providing citizens with safety while respecting citizens' freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Conclusion

The ways in which protestors, social movements, and, broadly, *social groups*, viewed as deviant, and potentially "disorderly," "troublesome," "unruly" or "risky," are politically, legally and socially responded to have generated substantial inter-disciplinary debate for the last decades. These debates can be located in research on protest (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012), risk and (in)security, concerned with how social groups or phenomenon become defined as security threats and the power dynamics lying beneath the question of who has the power to define these (Bigo 2008; Huysmans 2000; Tsoukala 2009).

This paper contributes by advancing, and drawing these scholarly debates even more tightly together, while heeding to the call of placing the regulation of protest and football crowds within a wider context of social and crime control (cf. Kienscherf 2016; Oliver 2008) and also utilizing theoretical frames offered by Beck (1999, 2008) and Bigo's (2000) scholarship capturing the emergence of transnational risk (and its management) and blurred internal/external security. Specifically, this article sheds an important light on the political dynamics of "security" and "risk" at the EU level which, as contended, has driven a wider securitization of transnational significant, potential disorder in urban spaces, which is revealed by the EU's approach to, first, football crowd violence and, subsequently transnational protest.

As this article argues, these dynamics reveal how social groups, seen to challenge the "power" or "order" of states, are politically constructed on a supranational level as not just an *issue*, but a *security issue*. Whilst the social scientific debates have demonstrated the expanded European security agenda where "more and more parts of the social are connoted as 'threats'" (Fritsch and Kretschmann 2021:222), and studies on social movements and protest commonly points – albeit somewhat cursory – toward the nexus between EU approaches to football crowds and transnational protests and that similar approaches have characterized these two fields since the start of the millennium (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012), two related aspects have remained unclear and under-examined. First, analyses that explore how aspects of social life are connoted as threats over temporal periods within the wider context of risk averse institutions and particularized expert systems (Beck 1999; Bigo 2000). Second, exactly how the EU's regulatory frameworks *vis-à-vis* football crowds accelerated trends in protest policing from the late 1990s and early 2000s and how these configurations' impacts live on as a "security legacy" in the present-day. By subscribing to a genealogy of security approach, concerned with historicizing how meanings and *doxas* of "security" have emerged and changed over time (Bigo 2024), so to understand present-day politics of security, this article contributes toward a clarification of these two under-explored issues.

It argues that the nexus between EU approaches to football crowds and transnational protest is not only an exemplar of diffusion and knowledge-transfer from one field to another (Della Porta and Tarrow 2012), but that this may be understood more widely as the concretization of EU institutions' securitization of transnationally mobile and potentially "disorderly," "risky", and "troublesome" social groups operating across European urban spaces from the mid-1990s onwards. The EU level responses to football crowd violence did not just prompt cross-overs with and interventions in the protest field; they reveal the precautionary stance adopted to social groups seen to challenge normative visions of a "perfect state of law and order that" (Krøijer 2013: 34), rationalized not by what has taken place, but what may (or may not) occur in the future (Beck 2002). Crucially, the implications of this are seen not only in terms of how the civil liberties and human rights of football supporters and protestors alike may be jeopardized, but this means that, despite recent tendencies of "de-securitization" and an embracement of dialogue with members of the relevant social group (Lee Ludvigsen , 2025b) , such progressive outcomes are partly overshadowed by the concurrent conservation of stances that consider the same social group a security threat to public order that must be responded to through the innovation of new laws and strategies (Coenen, Pearson and Tsoukala 2016).

Taken together – in a time where public order issues and the criminalization of protest appear high on European political agendas (Cristiano et al. 2023) – this article's arguments remain sociologically important because they contribute to, and pull, closer together, three different research trajectories; including studies on social movements, protest, and policing (Della Porta 2013; Della Porta and Tarrow 2012; Reiter and Fillieule 2006), the regulation of football crowds on the European and EU level (Mojet 2005; Tsoukala 2009) and critical security-related and sociological perspectives on risk and security in a global age (Beck 1999; Bigo 2008). It does so, by revealing how institutional frameworks developed around (often) politically unprotected social groups (della Porta, and Reiter 2006), seen to challenge ideas of transnational order and security, evolve over time and concretize these groups' status as a "security issue" (Tsoukala 2009) whereby not only the "known offender" or "troublemaker" is subjected to harsh measures, but crucially: "all citizens who may potentially become security threats" (Krøijer 2013: 37).

Notes

1. European football's governing body.
2. An analysis of this Convention cannot be provided here, see Coenen, Pearson, and Tsoukala (2016).

Author contributions

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