

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT 2014

JO ATTICA 2014

Operations Division,
Joint Operations Unit
Return Operations Sector

Approved at Warsaw
/ /2015

[signed]

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1. Background information

1.1. Brief risk assessment

The ATTICA Project was implemented initially in Athens in the 4th quarter of 2009. The first steps in establishing the return Coordination Office were taken. Project Attica 2010 started with screening at the Greek-Turkish maritime border, where the trend of “nationality swapping” initially emerged and where the Frontex coordinated joint operation Poseidon Sea was implemented.

The displacement of the migratory flow from the Greek-Turkish maritime border towards the Greek-Turkish land border (since 2010) and to a lesser extent to the Bulgarian-Turkish land border (since 2012) has led to the extension of the Attica Project from the Greek-Turkish maritime border to the other border sections, with the permanent deployment of screening teams in Greece and a flexible deployment in Bulgaria.

The migration flow changed at the beginning of August 2012, when the Hellenic authorities launched operation Aspida at the Greek-Turkish land border, which led to a partial displacement of the migratory flow initially towards the Greek-Turkish maritime border.

Since March 2013 screenings were conducted on daily basis in Bulgaria and in November 2013, the Bulgarian authorities implemented an operation at the land border with Turkey, deploying additional manpower and assets. As a consequence of the operation, the number of irregular migrants apprehended sharply decreased, while the number of irregular migrants increased at the Greek-Turkish sea border.

The screening activities conducted in the operational areas of the JO Poseidon Land and the JO Poseidon Sea indicate that the presence of screening teams deter migrants from claiming a false nationality: historical data shows a significant increase in similar claimed and presumed nationalities after migrants realise that they are going to be screened by experts.

Based on the above mentioned factors and taking into consideration the existing migratory pressure it is recommended to continue the implementation of JO Attica in the above mentioned operational areas. The data gathered from screening interviews are also important for analytical purposes, offering a better perspective concerning irregular migratory flows.

1.2. Operational aim

The operational aim of JO Attica 2014 was to support Greece and Bulgaria in return capacity building.

The implemented coordinated screening activity at Greek/Turkish land- and sea borders and the Bulgarian/Turkish land border can be seen as the first step in an effective return process.

The operational aims were implemented in full compliance with the relevant EU law, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the relevant international law, including the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951, the respect for fundamental rights in particular the access to international protection and the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and taking into account the recommendations of the Frontex Consultative Forum.

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

It was a long-term operation, covering 12 months, from 26 March 2014 until 25 March 2015

The operational activities were carried out at the following locations:

In Greece:

- Athens [Return Coordination Office (RCO) established at the Aliens Directorate of Attica]
- Greek-Turkish sea border (islands Samos and Lesvos)
- Greek-Turkish land border (Police Directorates of Alexandroupolis and Orestiada)

In Bulgaria

- Bulgarian-Turkish land border (regional Police Directorates Elhovo, BPU Elhovo).
- As of 20th October 2014: Sofia (Detention Centre "Busmantsi")

1.4. Participants

Host member states: 2

- Greece
- Bulgaria

Home member states: 16

- GR: 2 participating authorities, no Specific Financial Decision issued
- BG: 2 participating authorities, no Specific Financial Decision issued
- NL and RO: 2 participating authorities each
- AT, DK, EE, ES, FR, IT, LV, PL, PT, SI, SK, UK: 1 participating authority each.

Deployed resources:

Screening experts:

- 9 deployments of guest officers (GO) and 16 deployments of seconded guest officers (SGO), all with the profile of a screening expert took place (totally 2.065 deployment days); some officers had multiple deployments.
- Some planned deployments of MS' guest officers were shortened or cancelled.

Interpreters:

- 84 deployments of interpreters from DK, IT, NL and UK took place (totally 3.189 deployment days); some interpreters had multiple deployments.

Experts on "coercive measures used in return operations":

- 2 experts from NL participated in Sofia (BG) in a workshop on "coercive measures used in return operations" (total 8 days)

Experts on "Solid Funds":

- 2 experts from SI participated in Sofia (BG) in a workshop on "Solid Funds" (total 8 days)

No involvement of Third countries or other Union agencies and bodies or international organizations.

No specific technical equipment has been deployed.

1.5. Financial information

The initial budget assigned was equal to 1,600,000.00 €. Three (3) amendments were made in order to react sufficiently to the operational needs as well as to release and transfer the unused funds to the main budget of Return Operations Sector. The final approved overall budget was 1,400,000.00 €.

The overall total payments level on 15.04.2015 was 89% of the committed funds and the further reimbursements are still ongoing.

2. Achievement of objectives

Objectives	Indicators	Achieved / partly achieved / not achieved
Enhance capability for return of illegally staying Third Country nationals	Number of screened migrants (GR, BG)	Partly Achieved
	Percentage of apprehended migrants screened (GR, BG)	Achieved
	Support to the Greek Return Coordination Office (GR)	Achieved
	Support to Bulgaria in development of a centralised office for return related issues (BG)	Partly achieved

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

The program of work 2014 identified, based on Frontex Risk Assessment, the geographical and topical areas to be covered by Concepts. The main objective of the Poseidon Concept is to further develop the permanent organisational structures and strengthen effective border control at the South Eastern borders and Eastern Mediterranean region by implementing harmonized and targeted joint operational activities as well as to enhance support in further mapped and sustainable processes of migration management including permanent support in Return Capacity Building (sustainable return management and national return-related procedures).

The following joint activities took place in the framework of the Poseidon Concept:

- JO Poseidon land
- JO Poseidon Sea
- JO Attica

Return Operations Sector (ROS)

- Coordination and co-financing of JROs with the participation of Greece and Bulgaria as well as JRO organized by Greece;
- Knowledge and experience gathered is valuable for the follow-up operation(s)

Land Borders Sector (LBS) and Sea Borders Sector (SBS)

- Linkage of JO Attica with the joint operations Poseidon 2014 Land and Sea under the Poseidon Regional Concept.
- Continuation of constructive collaboration between the operational teams, in particular in the exchange of relevant information between the screening officers (JO Attica) and the debriefing experts (JO Poseidon Land and Sea) led to the achievement of the objectives in the respective operations;

Training Unit (TRU)

In the year 2014 TRU organized 2 Profile trainings for screening experts, attended by 32 screeners from 16 countries: (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden)

- Profile training for Screening Experts I/2014: May 2014, Italy; 16 participants
- Profile training for Screening Experts II/2014: September 2014, Lithuania, 16 participants

Standard profile training for screening experts is focused on assumption of nationality and identity of undocumented migrants and lasts 5 working days. Topics covered range from tasks of screening experts, assumptions of nationality and identity, screening booklet, work with an interpreter to identification of persons in need of international protection and risk factors during a screening interview.

National course for screeners for Greek officers, held in Athens, Greece in November 2014.

Activity tailored to the needs of Greek screeners was attended by 15 local officers, selected by the Greek authority. The course was organized as an ad hoc activity upon the request of the Greek authorities and Head of Frontex Liaison Office in Greece due to the change of the migration pressure in Greece. The course provided screeners from the Attica region with knowledge, skills and competences necessarily for the assumption of nationality/identity of undocumented migrants.

For the quality management of Operational Briefings, two national briefings were monitored under the Attica project 2014 (September: Lesbos - Greece; November: Samos - Greece) by assigned Frontex TRU Project Sub-Leader (PSL). Both national briefings were accomplished like stipulated within the Operational Plan and respective Annexes based on the delivered Common Briefing Pack by national briefers. Supportive feedback has been provided by PSL to national briefers and a detailed report has been shared with the operational manager with recommendations for further slight improvements, which could be taken into consideration for the operational activity in 2015.

4. Operational results

Bulgaria:

- Continuation of successful implementation of permanent screening activities as an integral part of national procedure;
- Permanent Frontex deployments of both the screening experts and the interpreters;
- Screenings were performed by joint screening teams of guest officers, national screeners supported by Frontex deployed interpreters;
- Screenings were performed during the first 24 hrs. after apprehension, but also inside of the detention centres after the first 24 hrs., in particular re-screenings; excellent cooperation with the detention centres;
- In Elhovo, the national screener and deployed screener shared the workload equally (49/51%);
- In Svilengrad, the national screener(s) performed the majority of the screenings (94%) and worked almost independently with the minimal support from the FSO-Return;
- The new unit Counteraction against irregular migration (CIM) was created and established

- Successful workshop held in Sofia with the aim to increase knowledge about the European “solid funds”. Active participation from SI experts.
- Successful workshop held in Sofia with the aim to increase knowledge about coercive measures used during return flights. Active participation from NL experts;
- The Frontex Return Capacity Advisor supported on structuring the new Bulgarian Return Capacity Unit.
- The Frontex Return Capacity Advisor supported the Host Member State in specific return related matters to build overall capacity. Therefore he addressed regularly the responsible units and shared his experiences and gave advices;

Greece:

- Continuation of successful implementation of permanent screening activities as an integral part of national procedure at Athens and at the Greek-Turkish land borders;
- Improved infrastructure and working conditions at the Greek-Turkish sea border;
- Continuous improvement of the screening activities to meet the increased flow of migrants at the Greek-Turkish sea border, namely on Samos and Lesbos;
- Successful collaboration with the mobile unit of the Greek First Reception Service, screening results now used to register migrants;
- The document expert deployed by Sea Borders Sector was supportive to screening activities;
- At the Greek-Turkish land border the Greek screening experts performed screening interviews independently, with the minimal support from the FSO-Return and the Frontex deployed interpreters;
- Independent active management by the Greek screening coordinators at the Greek-Turkish land border with the minimal support from the FSO-Return;
- Increased number of national screeners in Athens;
- Independent and enhanced management of the pool of screeners in Athens;
- Increased number of available national interpreters in Athens;
- Continuation of screening activities as a part of the operational needs in Athens;
- Improved internal coordination between the different parts of Return Coordination Office (RCO);
- Improved cooperation between the RCO and the Return unit at the HQ of HP;
- Except for screening the Return Coordination Office (RCO) in Athens continued to work independently from Frontex;
- Continuation of RCO to manage a high number of national return operations in the year 2014 (9 flights, 390 returnees);
- Increased number of 3rd country nationals returned by Frontex Joint Return Operations (165)
- Active Frontex support by JO Attica in order to develop and set-up a pre-return center at Athens Airport;
- The Frontex Return Capacity Advisor supported the Host Member State in specific return related matters to build overall capacity by addressing each part of the removal process;

Bulgaria & Greece:

- Successful implementation of Seconded Guest officers (SGO) deployments;

- 17 MS/SAC provided assistance to Greece and Bulgaria by deploying 16 seconded Guest officers, 9 guest officers and supported by 84 interpreters in order to support the host countries with the migratory influx;
- Screenings of newly apprehended irregular migrants, resulting in the assumption of their nationality as the first step in returning them;
- Very good collaboration between the screening and debriefing teams;
- Excellent use of the common pool of interpreters to support the screening and debriefing teams;
- Continuously enhancing level of expertise of deployed Member States' screening officers;
- Interpreters deployed from 4 different member States and 1 interpreter deployed by Frontex procurement;
- Interpreters' performance was a key element of successful screening;
- Exchange of knowledge, best practice and professional experience between the guest officers, the interpreters and the Greek as well as the Bulgarian officers;

EU added value of the Joint Operation

The screening interviews in the hosting Member States resulted in an assumption of the irregular migrants' nationalities; this allows the national authority to continue with the documentation and return process, when the migrants are deemed returnable.

An increase of capacity of the permanent structure of the return process can only be achieved by following a well-developed mechanism, starting by screenings, followed by identification (documentation) interviews, acquisition of travel documents and finally resulting in successful removals.

The Joint Operation supported Greece at the sea borders by supporting screening activities, with the aim to increase the confidence and involvement of the Greek screening officers as well as the overall management of the screening process.

The implementation in the past few years of permanent deployments of screening experts and interpreters in Athens, sharing their knowledge and experience with the local officers, engagement of the Greek officers in the screening process, the realization of several screening course have led to the increase of the knowledge and abilities of the Greek officers to perform their screening tasks. It has unarguably also helped to build basic foundations for the overall return capacity building,

The deployment of FSO-Return supported Greece and Bulgaria to sustain the screening process at the Greek-Turkish and western Bulgarian-Turkish land borders, with a focus on the Host Member States having full responsibility for coordination of screening activities and the actual screening interviews. This deployment resulted in an increase of ability to manage local screening activity with the minimal support from the FSO-Return.

Two Bulgarian officers were selected for a screening expert deployments (as a Seconded Guest officer). Their deployments supported the increase of in-depth knowledge among Bulgarian officers in the field of screening.

One Greek officer from the Screening unit at Athens was selected for a screening expert deployment (as a Guest officer). His deployment will be supportive to the Greek screening unit in Athens.

The operational team provided active support to the training for screening experts, open to all eligible members of EBGT pool, nominated for profile "screener". The additional group of officers successfully completed the training, thereby increasing the group of officers with specific screening skills and knowledge up to 158. This is beneficial not only for the follow-up capacity building operations but also for other future operational activities coordinated by Frontex, in case they include screening activities.

