

**FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT 2017**

# **Joint Operation Minerva 2017**

**Operations Division  
Joint Operations Unit  
Sea Borders Sector**

Approved at Warsaw

*[signed]*  
**Berndt Körner**  
*Deputy Executive Director*



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## 1. Background information

### 1.1. Brief risk assessment

The JO Minerva 2017 was implemented during the return phase of the Spanish Operation 'Paso del Estrecho' (OPE) at the BCPs Algeciras and Tarifa and in the seaport of Ceuta. The aim of this Frontex Operation was to support the Spanish authorities during the period when a large number of regular passengers were returning from Morocco to their countries of residence, and to detect irregular migrants who tried to blend into the regular flow of passengers or to hide aboard regular transit of vehicles. The JO Minerva 2017 was launched on 15 July and concluded on 15 September.

In 2017, during the OPE (15 June - 15 September), more than three million passengers and almost 700 000 vehicles crossed the Strait of Gibraltar transiting 16 seaports in three different countries (8 in Spain, 4 in Morocco and 4 in Algeria), which represented a slight increase in passenger and vehicle compared with the same period in 2016.

Of the three million passengers, 1 528 650 were recorded during the 'return phase' (15 July - 15 September) of the OPE and during the operational period of the JO Minerva 2017. The operational areas of the JO Minerva 2017 included three of the eight Spanish seaports, namely Algeciras, Ceuta and Tarifa; 72% of the total number of regular passengers (1 528 650) who crossed the Strait of Gibraltar during the 'return phase' (see Fact Sheets - Statistics, 4.1.) passed through these seaports. In addition, 654 irregular migrants were apprehended in the Strait of Gibraltar during this period, which represented a stable trend compared with 2016.

### 1.2. Operational aim

To implement coordinated operational activities at the external sea borders of the Western Mediterranean region in order to control irregular migration flows towards the territory of the EU Member States<sup>1</sup> (MS) and to tackle cross border crime.

### 1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

Based on the analysis of previous JO in the area, the operation was planned and executed between 14<sup>th</sup> of July and 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2017 - in total 64 days (*63 operational days, excluding the Operational Briefing*).

The timing of the JO, which took into consideration specific factors such as the schooling calendar, both in Spain and in Morocco, and the religious festivities of the Muslim calendar is assessed as being correct.

The operational activities were implemented in three different operational areas in the Strait of Gibraltar: BCP Algeciras, BCP Tarifa and the identity check-point in Port of Ceuta.

### 1.4. Participants

The joint operation was hosted by Spain.

Home MSs were: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland.

During *JO Minerva 2017*, **60 officers** from **17 different authorities** of **14 MS** were deployed to the operational areas.

From 7<sup>th</sup> of August to 13<sup>st</sup> of August 2017, **one Georgian observer** was deployed within the BCP Algeciras.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the present document, the term "Member State" includes also the States participating in the relevant development of the Schengen acquis in the meaning of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and its Protocol (No 19) on the Schengen acquis integrated into the framework of the European Union.

The constant correspondence and cooperation with INTERPOL continued during 2017 as well like in the previous years, but it was considered not to implement a deployment of Interpol officers within the operational area of the JO Minerva, due to the fact that the ESP authorities already have access to the databases used by Interpol for checking persons crossing the borders.

During the period 01.08 - 30.09.2017, the *Joint Operation Focal Points Sea 2017* was suspended and all the deployments were cancelled, as a decision of the Frontex' management. Additionally to this measure, FX proposed to all involved MSs to redeploy their experts from the cancelled deployments to the operational area of the JO MINERVA 2017 where the number of gaps within profiles was extremely high and where the operational need in terms of flows of passengers and number of incidents requested immediate intervention.

### 1.5. Financial information

The budget initially allocated for the JO was at the level of 600,000 €. In the course of implementation period it was increased to 980,000 € due to the reinforcement of the operation in the month of August and September, as well as more expensive MSs' deployments comparing to primary estimation.

## 2. Achievement of objectives

Objectives	Indicators	Level of achievement
Enhance border security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out border checks of all persons and their transportation means, support the national authorities in detecting smuggling of migrants, trafficking and other cross border crimes</li> </ul>	Achieved
Enhance operational cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High level of MS participation in operational activities</li> <li>Enhanced cooperation with other EU agencies and bodies or international organisations and multi-character operational concept to be applied</li> <li>Enhanced cooperation between national authorities of the host MS as well as on an international level</li> <li>Seeking involvement of Third countries in operational activities</li> </ul>	Achieved
Enhance exchange of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collection of operational information from all actors involved</li> <li>Distribution of operational information to operational actors through the respective authorized channels</li> <li>Implementation of fully automated online reporting system</li> <li>Seeking standardized format and quality of the reports and interviews</li> <li>Use of the "Guidelines for JORA Incident Template" and "Common Risks Indicators"</li> <li>Implementation of PeDra Project</li> </ul>	Partly achieved
Identify possible risks and threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Debriefing activities to support migration management and obtaining intelligence</li> </ul>	Achieved

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring political, economic and social situation in the countries of origin and transit</li> </ul>	
Establish and exchange best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering and supporting workshops, meetings and other network events</li> <li>Delivering and supporting operational briefings/debriefings including information on fundamental rights</li> <li>To support targeted training</li> </ul>	Achieved
Guarantee the protection and compliance with fundamental rights in activities encompassed by the JO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting identification of persons in vulnerable situation including those in need of international protection or asylum</li> <li>Referral of persons in vulnerable situation including those in need of international protection or asylum to the Officers of the host MS to be further directed to the competent national authorities for appropriate assistance</li> <li>Sharing expertise and best practices related to strengthening the rights of persons in vulnerable situation in the performance of border guard tasks</li> <li>Providing guidance through trainings, briefings, observations and recommendations on fundamental rights matters during operational activities, including information on the complaints mechanism</li> </ul>	Fully achieved

### 3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

**Reference Manual** - Frontex staff updated the First-Line Officers with the latest falsification techniques and types of documents and conducted specific training on how to detect imposters.

**VEGA Manual and THB Profiles** - The latest updated version of the VEGA Manual and the interactive THB Profiles 2014 were distributed to all participants since the documents are considered applicable to first-line tasks at sea borders' BCPs.

**Common Risks Indicators** - implemented in the BCPs (along with the FP Sea JO), for identifying the risks and threats regarding the Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)

**PeDra** - implemented as part of the operational response to facilitate the collection, analysis and transmission of personal data to Frontex for further processing at the EU level.

**JO Focal Points Sea** - before the start of the JO MINERVA, a Sea Focal Point is activated in Algeciras, as each year, starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Also, after the end of the JO MINERVA, the FP Algeciras is again reactivated until the 31<sup>st</sup> of October

### 4. Operational results

During the JO Minerva 2017, **2 748 incidents** were reported in the seaports of Algeciras, Tarifa and Ceuta, involving **3 050 persons**, which represents a stable trend compared with 2016. Of the 2 748 incidents reported, **372 were related to illegal border-crossings**, involving the apprehension of **654 irregular migrants** and the arrest of **21 people smugglers**. Other cases were linked to cross-border crime, refusals of

entry, hits in databases, and administrative/minor offences (see Fact Sheets - Statistics, 4.2.).

With regard to **illegal immigration** incidents, a **stable trend** in the number of incidents and migrants was reported. As in previous years, **Moroccan and Algerian** were the most common nationalities reported in 2017. Of the **654 irregular migrants** apprehended, 85% were detected in the seaport of Ceuta. The following incidents (372) and *modi operandi* were identified in 2017:

- 130 incidents related to migrants avoiding border controls, involving **302 irregular migrants** (261 were detected in Ceuta, 37 in Algeciras, and 4 in Tarifa), and the arrest of 2 people smugglers.
- 90 incidents related to falsification/document fraud, involving 91 irregular migrants (78 were reported in Ceuta, 11 in Algeciras, and 2 in Tarifa), and the arrest of 12 people smugglers.
- 152 incidents related to persons hiding in transportation means, involving 261 irregular migrants (218 apprehended in Ceuta, 40 in Algeciras and 3 in Tarifa), and the arrest of 7 people smugglers.

In relation to **cross-border crime**, 75 cases were reported and 22 smugglers were arrested, which represents a stable trend compared with 2016:

- 4 cases related to the smuggling of drugs, involving 6 smugglers, and the seizure of 34 kg of cocaine and over 6 kg of hashish.
- 45 administrative cases were related to the possession of a low quantity of drugs (for personal consumption), involving the seizure of 6 grams of cocaine and 295 grams of hashish. In addition, 11 400 cigarettes and two knives were also seized;
- 3 cases related to cigarette smuggling, and the seizure of 11 400 cigarettes.
- 3 cases related to the smuggling of other goods, involving 3 smugglers, and the seizure of over 200 counterfeit clothes and stolen mobiles, and over 2 000 medicinal pills.
- 21 cases related to stolen vehicles, mostly smuggled whole, involving 16 smugglers.

As regards the incidents related to persons suspected of being foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) or related to terrorism, 31 cases were recorded:

- 31 incidents related to likely FTF suspicious travel cases or related to terrorist activities. The majority of incidents were connected to hits in database (SIS & national databases) rather than to a result of an identification of possible 'subjects of interest' based on the FTF 'Common Risk Indicators'.

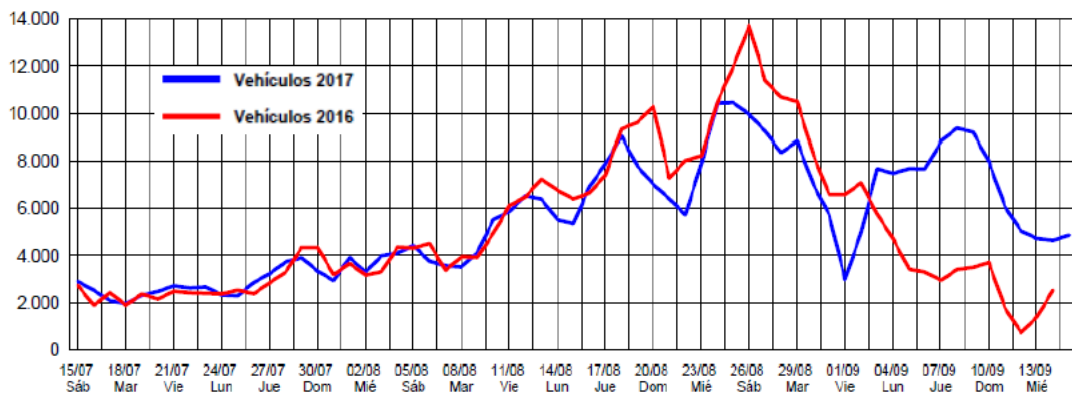
In relation to **other types of incidents**, 2 270 cases were reported:

- 423 incidents related to **persons refused entry**. The main reason for issuing the refusal of entry was the lack of justification of the purpose and conditions of their entry and stay (E - no appropriate documentation) and, to a lesser extent, the lack of a valid visa (C - no valid visa or resident permit).
- 8 incidents related to **overstayers**.
- 1 656 persons identified with a **positive hit in databases** (national and international). Most identified persons were the nationals of Morocco, Spain and France, and, to a lesser extent, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Italy.
- 177 incidents related to **administrative or minor offences** (excluding the 45 incidents related to the detection of small quantities of drugs);
- 6 **other types of incidents**, involving 8 persons (excluding the 2 incidents related to the detection of small quantities of drugs).

The last days of the OPE (September 2017) saw a high volume of passengers, which was unusual since typically, the number of passengers reaches a peak at the end of August. The reason for this was the fact that a large number of Moroccans decided to delay their return to their countries of residence and celebrate the Eid Al-Adha holiday with their families in Morocco (see Fact Sheets - Statistics, 4.1.).

***EU added value of the operation***

The added value of the implementation of the JO Minerva 2017 was the support provided by this Frontex operation (i.e. the experts from Member States and Schengen Associated Countries) to the Spanish authorities at the time of high migratory pressure (during the 'return phase' of the OPE: 15 July - 15 September), when 1.5 million passengers crossed the Strait of Gibraltar from North Africa to Spain. The large number of incidents related to irregular migration and cross-border crimes indicates that the operational period and areas were accurately defined.

**FACT SHEETS****1. Statistics****4.1. The number of vehicles detected during the 'return phase' of the 'Operation Paso del Estrecho' 2017, compared with the same period in 2016**

Source: OPE 2017 (the Ministry of Interior & General Direction of Civil Protection and Emergencies)



## 2. Map

2.1. The number of incidents and irregular migrants reported in JO Minerva 2017, and the ferries operating between Ceuta, Tangier-Med and Tangier Ville in Northern Africa and the BCPs Algeciras and Tarifa in Spain during the ‘Operation Paso del Estrecho’ 2017’.

