

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on Border Surveillance Operational Response Division Field Deployment Unit

Approved at Warsaw

[signed]
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1. Background information

1.1. Brief Risk assessment

1.1.1. South Eastern land border

The total number of irregular migrant apprehensions during the implementation of the JO FOA 2017 Land (SE) at all border sections was 8 551 in 1 593 incidents. In addition, 277 people smugglers were arrested. The figures below show the split of migrant apprehensions per border section.

- Greek-Turkish: 5 618
- Greek-FYROM: 146
- Greek-Albanian: 902
- Bulgarian-Turkish: 394
- Bulgarian-Serbian: 1 491
- Bulgarian-FYROM: 0

Comparing the figures from both, the Bulgarian and Greek land borders with Turkey as well as the Bulgarian border with Serbia in 2017, with the figures reported during the whole of 2016 (16 383 migrant apprehensions) a decrease of 48% in terms of the number of migrant apprehensions was registered during the JO in 2017. A comparison with the data reported from the Greek-Albanian and the Greek border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was not possible because this border section was not included in the JO in previous years.

According to operational data collected within the Joint Operation Reporting Application (JORA), during the period of the implementation of the JO FOA 2017 land (SE), the Greek authorities reported a 133% increase in the number of irregular migrant apprehensions compared with the previous 12-month period.

The Bulgarian authorities reported an 80% decrease in the number of migrant apprehensions during the implementation period of the JO 2017 at their common land border with Turkey compared with the previous year. In addition, a decrease of 88% in migrant apprehensions was reported from the Bulgarian-Serbian border compared with data collected during the JO FOA BCU 2016.

The increase in migrant apprehensions at the Greek-Turkish land border was related to a surge in the number of Turkish nationals crossing the border illegally via the Evros river from Turkey to Greece. The decrease in the number of migrant apprehensions at the Bulgarian land border sections with Turkey and Serbia can mainly be attributed to the closure of the Western Balkan corridor at the beginning of March 2016 and the further development of the engineering technical obstacle (ETO) at the Bulgarian land border with Turkey.

1.1.1. Western Balkans

The number of migrant apprehensions registered from January to December 2017 (12 179¹) at the EU's external land borders with the Western Balkans shows a **sharp decrease of -91%** compared with the same twelve-month period in 2016. The Hungarian and Croatian borders with Serbia registered most of this irregular migratory pressure as nearly 81% of the irregular migrants were reported from these border sections.

¹ FRAN data as of 5 February 2018.

Irregular migration in the Western Balkans is largely influenced by two distinct flows, one coming from the region itself and the other linked to non-regional migrants who gather in Turkey and afterwards transit via Greece or Bulgaria and the Western Balkans en route to Western Europe.

During the implementation period of the JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land WB (from 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2018), roughly 10 000² detections of illegal border-crossing were reported by the Hungarian and Croatian authorities at their land borders with Serbia. **Most of these migrants (8 517³) were reported by the Hungarian authorities.**

From 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2018 at the Hungarian and Croatian land borders with Serbia 6 243⁴ irregular migrants were reported within the operational area of the JO Flexible Operational Activities on Border Surveillance 2017 WB (hereinafter JO FOA 2017 Land WB). Along the Western Balkan route, the situation has been relatively stable, levelling off at around 800 monthly detections in late spring and early summer. During the period from July to November, monthly detections oscillated between 900 and almost 1 500. In contrast, monthly apprehensions plummeted to around 280 in December, which represents an almost 80% drop in detections compared with the same month of 2016.

It is worth emphasising that in reaction to the constant migration pressure, **Hungary has gradually adopted special measures to reinforce the border with Serbia** with the establishment of fixed checkpoints, mobile border guard patrols along the main routes and reinforcement of their land borders with new “border surveillance officers”, the completion of the second engineering technical obstacle (ETO), the installation of border protection bases of the Hungarian Defence Forces at Kelebia and Hercegszanto and the establishment of the new legislation on migration.

1.2. Operational aim

The operational aim of the joint operation was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU external land borders in order to control irregular migration flows towards the territory of the MS of the European Union (EU), to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation.

The operational aim was implemented in full compliance with the relevant EU and international law, guaranteeing 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 and the reports and observations of the Fundamental Rights Officer.

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

The joint operation was implemented from 1 February 2017 till 31 January 2018.

The operational activities were implemented in two separate locations, at South Eastern external land borders and the Western Balkan area; International Coordination Centres were established for each of the two areas:

South Eastern external land borders:

- International Coordination Centre (ICC SE)
- Greek - Turkish land border

² FRAN data as of 5 February 2018.

³ FRAN data as of 5 February 2018.

⁴ JORA data as of 5 February 2018. Discrepancies between FRAN data and JORA data are mainly caused by migrants illegally crossing into Hungary and Croatia through crossing points located outside of the operational area of JO FOA 2017 BCU (WB).

- Greek - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia land border
- Greek - Albanian land border
- Bulgarian - Turkish land border
- Bulgarian - Serbian land border
- Bulgarian - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia land border

Western Balkans area:

- International Coordination Centre (ICC WB)
- Croatian - Serbian land border
- Hungarian - Serbian land border

1.4. Participants

The Joint Operation was hosted by Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia with the participation of 27 Member States and Schengen Associated Countries (SACs) and namely Austria, Bulgaria (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Croatia (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Hungary (Home MS regarding deployment to Greece and Bulgaria), Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

In addition, 7 cooperating non Countries participated with observers, namely Albania, Georgia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo⁵, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine.

Each MS participated with one authority, with the exception of Portugal, which participated with Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras, Guarda Nacional Republicana and Policia Segurança Publica and Spain, which participated with Cuerpo Nacional de Policia and Guardia Civil and Italy. The number of participating authorities reached 31, including Hellenic Police and Bulgarian Border Police and IND (Immigration and Naturalization Service) from Netherlands, which participated with the deployment of interpreters, apart from the participation of the Royal Marechausse concerning the deployment of Frontex Support Officers, debriefing experts and green border surveillance experts.

During the implementation of Rapid Border Intervention Exercise - REX 2017, additional TMs were deployed from Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

2. Achievement of objectives

- Enhance border security - The objective was **partially achieved**.
- Enhance operational cooperation - The objective has been **achieved**.
- Enhance exchange of information - The objective was **partially achieved**.
- Identify possible risks and threats - The objective was **partially achieved**.
- Establish and exchange best practices - The objective was **achieved**.

⁵ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of independence

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

3.1. JO Focal Points 2017 Land

Where operational areas of JO Focal Points 2017 Land and JO FOA 2017 BCU coincided, Focal Points were integrated in the JO FOA 2017 BCU general reporting and the deployed experts followed the coordination structure of JO FOA 2017 BCU. Experts deployed at JO Focal Points 2017 Land participated in the briefing and debriefing meetings thus enabling them to be fully integrated into the operational activities and giving them the possibility to provide their feedback.

The Focal Points operational concept supplemented the activities performed under the JO FOA 2017 BCU by the control of clandestine entry, information gathering and reporting process, interviews of passengers, irregular migrants or facilitators, also in providing any necessary operational support.

Communication between Team Members deployed to Frontex joint operations was an important part of effective information exchange. During the implementation phase, the experts deployed at the focal points in the operational area exchanged information by providing shift reports which were shared through established reporting channels.

The support provided by the experts deployed at the Focal Points land was highly appreciated and proved to be a useful tool for exchanging information and carrying out daily tasks.

3.2. Rapid Border Intervention Exercise 2017

Based on the experience from previous Rapid Border Intervention Exercises (REX), a goal to implement the exercise in real operational environment and to give participants the opportunity to test their knowledge and skills in practice was followed. Due to the ongoing gaps in human resources and technical equipment it was decided to fully integrate REX 2017 in the existing land borders operations in Bulgaria, namely JO FOA 2017 BCU and JO FP 2017 Land. REX 2017 deployments were carried out in Bulgaria, at its air border, land borders with Turkey and Serbia, and sea border.

Integration proved to be very successful as entire command and control, as well as reporting structure of FOA BCU was used with small adaptations also for REX 2017. This enabled common reports and comparable operational results.

3.3. Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on border checks

Within the framework of JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on Border Checks the deployments of seconded Team Members (sTM) took place. They provided operational support at the selected Focal Points located in the operational areas facing high irregular migration pressure and/or having the highest passengers' traffic and/or high numbers of cross-border crime activities detected at the border crossing points.

When being deployed in the operational areas of JO FOA 2017 BCU, sTM were supporting the reporting system established within this operation as well as they followed the coordination structure accordingly. Exchange of information among TMs/sTMs deployed in both flexible operations took place on daily basis. Experts deployed in the same operational area participated in the same local briefing meetings that from the very beginning facilitated the operational cooperation by strengthening the exchange of information process. Additionally, upon requests sTM provided trainings on stolen vehicles or/and verification of travel documents. They were also available 24/7

over the phone to check persons, documents and vehicles involved in facilitation of irregular migration and/or other type of cross-border crime, both at BCPs and border surveillance.

4. Operational Results

The operational aim of the joint operation was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU external land borders in order to control irregular migration flows towards the territory of the MS of the European Union (EU) and to tackle cross border crime.

Operational activities were planned in such a way that the area could be constantly monitored and situational awareness in the region could be maintained by identifying threats and risks affecting the external borders of the EU and to be able to adopt flexible operational responses to new developments.

4.1.1.1. South Easter land border

The operational results of the JO FOA 2017 land (SE) refer only to the incidents, which occurred at the “green borders” of Greece with Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania, Bulgaria with Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and with Serbia. Border checks and clandestine detections were not part of the JO and all the operational activities related to border checks were dealt with within the framework of the JO Focal Points 2017 Land.

During the implementation of the JO, the following results were reported (*according to JORA*):

- 1 593 illegal border-crossing incidents
- 8 551 irregular migrants apprehended
- 277 people smugglers arrested

4.1.1.2. Western Balkans

The JO FOA 2017 Land WB was implemented during the period from 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2018 with the aim of coordinating EU Member States’ operational cooperation to render effective border security at the borders of Hungary and Croatia with Serbia.

The operational activities were planned to constantly monitor the operational area and to maintain situational awareness in the region by identifying threats and risks affecting the EU’s external borders, in order to ensure a flexible operational response and to pay close attention to developments and trends on illegal immigration.

The operational results of the JO FOA 2017 Land WB refer only to the incidents that occurred at the “**green border**” of Hungary and Croatia with Serbia. Detections related to border checks or clandestine entries were not part of the JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land WB; all the operational activities linked to border checks were dealt with within the framework of the JO Focal Points 2017 Land.

During the JO FOA 2017 Land WB, the following operational results were reported (*according to JORA as of 5 February 2018*):

- 930 illegal border-crossing incidents involving the apprehension of 6 233 irregular migrants.
- 26 people smuggling incidents involving 172 irregular migrants and 48 people smugglers.
- 4 other incidents involving the detection of 10 persons.

5. Financial information

The final budget assigned to this operation was **11,087,350.77 EUR**