



Viewpoint

The shadowy business of fear-mongers

Ana González-Páramo
(Senior Researcher at *Fundación porCausa*¹)

Translation by Yurema Pallarés Pla

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Every morning, Spanish radio listeners are bombarded with advertisements for home security alarms, which spread fear of thieves, foreigners and squatters. Interestingly, such sermons mirror the mainstream narrative and messages from certain political parties. Suspicion is transmitted to a gullible society which absorbs this fear. Each European Council meeting reinforces the links between migration and security risks, adding new challenges such as terrorism, organised crime or new and emergent hybrid threats mixing all of them into one big pot. This approach favours the position of the arms and security industry, building a condensed net of private interests and ends up influencing the EU decision-making process and financing mechanisms. Nowadays, borders have become a polysemic and ever-present concept that goes beyond the physicality of a wall. Borders can be portable, digital, remote and adaptable even to the individuals they exclude and keep at bay.

This obsession for buttressing the borders is clearly reflected in the next EU long-term budget for the 2021-2027 period, intended to “step-up the Union’s role as security and defence provider”.² According to the Commission’s proposal, at least, €30.8 billion will be allocated to migration and border control (2.7% of the total budget and 207% more than the previous period), €24.3 billion will go to security and defence (2.1% of the total) as well as a large part of the €100 billion for innovation and the digital economy.³ The former EU Commission Vice-

¹ [Fundación porCausa](https://www.fundacionporcausa.org/) is a Spanish foundation working to ensure people are well informed about migrations through independent and truthful research and journalism.

² European Parliamentary Research Service, ‘2021-2027 multiannual financial framework and new own resources – Analysis of the Commission’s proposal’, July 2018, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2018/625148/EPRS_IDA\(2018\)625148_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2018/625148/EPRS_IDA(2018)625148_EN.pdf)

³ Editor’s note: These figures are from the Commission’s proposal, which is currently the subject of negotiations between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. In December 2019, the Finnish Council Presidency proposed significant reductions to the budgets for security and defence and migration and border management – the former would decrease to €14.691 billion and the latter

President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, Jyrki Katainen, said it was “the first time in the history of the European Union, that a part of the European budget is devoted to investing collectively to develop new technologies and equipment to protect our people.”⁴ He referred to the new European Defence Fund, which will boost “cross-border investments in state-of-the-art and fully interoperable technology and equipment in areas such as encrypted software and drone technology”.

Despite the lowest level of migrant arrivals since 2013 and the frustrating results for xenophobes at the May 2019 EU elections, the anti-migration rhetoric has hardened within EU institutions. The Von der Leyen Commission set up a vice-presidency for “Promoting (previously “Protecting”) our European way of life” in which migration and security are blended. Any other aspect related to migration other than irregular entries is almost invisible.

There is an unhampered agenda to outsource and transfer border control functions and responsibilities to origin and transit countries, regardless of the local human rights situation. This process is consolidated through EU readmission agreements, European External Action Service (EEAS) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) civil and military missions and operations (e.g. in Libya, Mali or Niger) and an increasing operational role for Frontex far beyond the European neighbourhood, extending for example to countries in the Sahel. Subcontracting migrant control is gradually intensified through informal channels that constitute a challenge for the rule of law because they find a way to elude the control of the European Parliament or the jurisdiction of the EU Court of Justice, as was the case with the 2016 EU-Turkey Declaration.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) was established as an institutional tool for Member States’ technical and specialised support to alleviate the EU institutions’ workload and allow them to focus on legislation and governance. After the adoption of its revised regulation in 2019,⁵ Frontex has not only expanded its budget exponentially, but the agency has been transformed from a mere facilitator or intermediary into an executive actor with its own hardware, equipment and capabilities, command and control functions to coordinate joint operations and to fulfil massive but discreet deportations (so-called returns), sign agreements with third parties and in the near future command a 10,000-strong armed border guard force. Frontex is often criticised for its lack of transparency and limited attention to human rights, but its relations with the industry are seldom exposed. Its securitised language seems to be addressed solely to protect European citizens, whereas the protection of migrants’ human rights is virtually absent from its institutional communication.

to €23.389 under these proposals. Nevertheless, these are still significant sums and negotiations are ongoing. See: Council of the EU, ‘Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027: Negotiating Box with figures’, 14518/1/18 REV 1, 5 December 2019, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14518-2019-REV-1/en/pdf>

⁴ European Commission press release, ‘EU budget: Stepping up the EU’s role as a security and defence provider’, 13 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_4121

⁵ Council of the EU press release, ‘European Border and Coast Guard: Council adopts revised regulation’, 8 November 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/08/european-border-and-coast-guard-council-adopts-revised-regulation/>

Much like domestic home alarms, Frontex would be the continental-scale guardian that guarantees the protection of our doors and windows. The common European home has become an idealised Schengen area where “our European way of life” is protected from menacing migrants and criminals. According to the Spanish barometer published in November 2019 by the Center of Sociological Research (CIS), the main concerns of Spaniards are unemployment (60,3%), politicians (45,5%), economic problems (30,4%), Catalan independence (19%), fraud and corruption (18,4%) and ranking only tenth on the list is immigration (11,3%). So, is it a real or an induced concern for Spaniards?

Fear is contagious and easily transmissible. European societies generally demand more protection against thieves, intruders or migrants. Étienne la Boétie wrote in 1579 his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* defending what would be called today’s civil disobedience. He exposed the people’s submission to the tyrant and pointed out that men obey corrupted leaders by custom. Nowadays, that tyrant is the fear permeating our societies and it looks like we will tamely follow its instructions.

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Web: www.statewatch.org | Email: office@statewatch.org | Phone: (00 44) 203 691 5227

Post: c/o MDR, 88 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH

Charity number: 1154784 | Company number: 08480724
Registered office: 2-6 Cannon Street, London, EC4M 6YH