

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT 2017

# Pulsar Concept Joint Operation Alexis 2017

Operations Division  
Joint Operations Unit  
Air Border Sector

Approved at Warsaw

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## 1. Background information

### 1.1. Brief risk assessment

The use of forged, counterfeit or improperly obtained passports and documents as well as the irregular/illegal use of authentic and false documents represents one of the major threats at airports associated with irregular migration. Combating counterfeiting not only requires law enforcement actions but also an important effort from manufacturers and issuers. The sheer volume of passenger air traffic inevitably means that a large number of persons will successfully manage to avoid current pre-departure document checks and therefore board a flight and arrive in the EU.

Smugglers and traffickers move migrants by air across the globe using genuine, authentic and false documentation. They plan complex and circuitous routings to disguise the true identity, provenance and indeed the nationality and intentions of their customers/victims.

Airports which have direct connections to Third Countries and where low cost air carriers are operating are usually under more pressure, once they become a major destination that is targeted by certain groups of migrants. At these airports, vulnerabilities could be the result of a lack of operational staff, motivation, equipment, common information systems, information exchange between Member States<sup>1</sup>, training, intelligence, etc...

Collective responses to these challenges are required to seek to identify the airports of embarkation, the routes and the airlines associated with a high risk of irregular migration. It is also necessary to adopt systems to develop useful profiles in order to identify high risk passengers from manifests or API/PNR data and to establish close cooperation with the airlines.

Effective first line checks, selective gate checks at arrivals or departures and targeted covert surveillance of the pre-entry and transit areas of airports serve to disrupt the activities of those seeking to abuse immigration controls at airports.

The objective of the Joint Operation was to support airports in EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries in respect of their own perceived vulnerabilities/needs concerning operational activities with regard to:

- Document fraud
- Human smuggling
- Trafficking in human beings

The activities were undertaken at the arrivals and exit controls of airports as well as in transit areas where appropriate gate checks were undertaken. The activities of the Team Members were defined according to the clustering of airports as outlined in the Operation Plan. The operational briefings and debriefings prepared for the four operational phases by the Risk Analysis Unit sought to provide an overview of the afore-mentioned phenomena at each airport that chose to participate in the operation.

### 1.2. Operational aim

Joint Operation Alexis 2017 was implemented in line with the provisions of the Frontex Single Programming Document 2016-2019 and under the umbrella of the Pulsar Concept 2017 in a series

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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.

of 4 phases focusing on airport vulnerabilities as perceived and communicated by Member States. Identified objectives were prioritized and the operational areas were established with the participation of EU international airports that experience similar vulnerabilities.

The main aim of Joint Operation Alexis 2017 was to contribute to meeting the needs of Member States by setting up operational procedures and deploying border guards in order to strengthen the capabilities of EU international airports in a tailored manner. For this reason Joint Operation Alexis 2017 aimed to enhance EU airport border guards' document expertise and their operational capabilities to detect document fraud and to contribute to the combating of People Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as contributing to the reduction of the vulnerabilities of EU airports.

The organization into four phases introduced an element of flexibility for what concerns the specific operational aims and targets. This allowed a swift and tailored response to new and emerging phenomena and needs identified through constant situation monitoring and the focus to the first results of vulnerability assessment exercise conducted by the Agency (see Art. 13 of Regulation 2016/1624).

### 1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

Joint Operation Alexis 2017 was implemented in four different phases at 34 airports of Member States as follows: Phase 1 between 21 February and 24 March 2017, Phase 2 between 27 April and 30 May 2017, Phase 3 between 29 August and 28 September 2017 and Phase 4 between 31 October and 29 November 2017.

### 1.4. Participants

In total 22 Member States, 5 Third Countries and 34 participating airports took part in the implementation of Joint Operation Alexis 2017. To support Alexis operational activities, Interpol deployed an IBMTF (Integrated Border Management Task Force) coordinator within Phase 2 (between 9 and 13 May 2017) and within Phase 4 (between 06 and 10 November 2017) at one of the participating airports).

During the Joint Operation, 95 officers (including 10 Third Country observers) were deployed at different airports according to the operational needs for a total of 2,879 man-days covering the profiles of Second-Line Airport Officer and/or Advanced-Level Document Officer.

### 1.5. Financial information

By 16 January 2018, the committed budget of the Joint Operation Alexis totalled 725,830 EUR.

## 2. Achievement of objectives

- Enhance exchange of knowledge among officers - Achieved.
- Enhance border security - Achieved.
- Enhance efficiency of border security - Achieved.
- Enhance operational cooperation - Achieved.

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

All activities within Joint Operation Alexis 2017 were designed to allow for parallel or complementary operational actions and to take advantage of other Frontex projects, especially the ones implemented by Air Border Sector (e.g.: The Joint Action Day (JAD) Aeolos organized within the framework of the EU Policy Cycle EMPACT and Operation Dragon concept - Joint Action Days)

In several cases, Team Members and seconded Team Members deployed under the umbrella of parallel or partially parallel air border joint operations (Joint Operation Focal Points Air 2017, Joint Operation Pegasus 2017 or Joint Operation Vega Children 2017) facilitated EU operational cooperation during JO Alexis 2017 by supporting the establishment and reinforcing of the Alexis activities and the implementation of the requested countermeasures and reporting tasks.

Following the conclusion and recommendations made following JO Alexis 2016, during JO Alexis 2017 Frontex once more organised dedicated document training courses, named "Road Shows". The concept of Road Shows aims at providing Member States with professional seminars to establish common standards for first and second line border checks in order to harmonize the competencies and specific skills of border guards, as well as to facilitate networking at an expert level with the aim of raising awareness amongst first line and gate check officers on the design and abuse of secure identity documents, awareness of available training tools and the latest trends in document abuse.

The Road Shows implemented between 16-18 May 2017 and 14-16 November 2017 were highly appreciated and welcomed by the 11 hosting airports (5 in 2016), which was also indicated by the high number of border guard officers trained by the 24 deployed document experts. A total of 744 officers were trained in the Road Shows organised within the framework of JO Alexis 2017. This activity, including the distribution of the Reference Manual tool has provided a significant contribution to the achievement of the planned objectives and it also represented an opportunity to create an awareness for the local officers of the concept of the Joint Operation.

## 4. Operational Results

The main aim of the activities undertaken within the framework of Joint Operation Alexis 2017 was to strengthen the operational capabilities of EU airports to address the perceived vulnerabilities/needs that they had mentioned in an Information Request Survey distributed at the end of 2016. By applying the Vega Handbook and the Standard Operational Procedures provided in the annexes of the operational plans, specific countermeasures were implemented during the Alexis operational activities.

During Joint Operation Alexis 2017 the following countermeasures were taken to react to the mentioned abuses according to the needs of the 34 participating airports:

- Gate Checks on Arrivals (including pre-arrival checks)
- Gate Checks on Departures
- First line check (including ABC and traditional border control)
- Transit area abuse only at selected airports

Document fraud allows migrants to enter the territory of the Member States illegally and to enjoy free movement in Europe, which also allows freedom of movement to members of criminal networks. Frontex has seen an increase in cases of impersonation in Member States. Moreover the detection of counterfeit and forged passports or ID cards has also increased significantly in recent years.

All these activities were performed at the participating airports where different structures, organisation, traffic and national law led to different results.

During JO Alexis 2017 11,265 specific countermeasures were implemented at the participating airports of which 8,839 were gate checks (arrivals and departures)

The 11,265 implemented countermeasures as well as the high number of participants (22 Member States, 34 participating airports and 5 Third Countries) and the 2,879 man-days deployed in the course of the joint operations contributed to the enhancement of border security.

During this operation, main threats as well as new and emerging aspects regarding irregular migration flows were also reported. The information provided by the participating airports greatly assisted Frontex Risk Analysis Unit in highlighting new and emerging trends.

#### **4.1. EU added value of the operational activity**

Joint Operation Alexis 2017 provided:

- Tailored operational support and capacity building strengthening Member States operational capabilities in order to overcome perceived vulnerabilities.
- Effective and efficient operational response to perceived vulnerabilities meeting current threats (European Situational Awareness) in order to enhance the security of external air borders.
- Increased response capacity to emergency situations.