

## FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

### Rapid Border Intervention Exercise 2017

2017/PRU/05

Operations Division

Joint Operations Unit

Land Borders Sector

Approved at Warsaw

*[signed]*

**Berndt Körner**  
Deputy Executive Director

## INDEX

### Contents

<b>1. Background information</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Brief risk assessment	4
1.2. Operational aim	5
1.2.1. REX 2017 Operational aim	5
1.2.2. Rapid Border Intervention exercise aim	5
1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas	6
1.4. Participants	6
<b>2. Achievement of objectives</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1. Operational objectives	7
2.1.1. Enhance border security	7
2.1.2. Provide technical and operational assistance in SAR cases	7
2.1.3. Support MS in carrying out coast guard functions	7
2.1.4. Enhance operational cooperation	7
2.1.5. Enhance exchange of information	8
2.1.6. Identify possible risks and threats	8
2.1.7. Establish and exchange best practices	8
2.2. Rapid border intervention exercise objectives	9
2.2.1. Enhance the awareness of and test the implementation of the existing rapid border intervention mechanism	9
2.2.2. Increase the number of members of the rapid reaction pool with relevant training and operational experience	9
2.2.3. Reinforcing the ongoing operational activities	9
<b>3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1. JO FOA 2017 Land on Border Surveillance	10
3.2. JO Focal Points 2017 Land/Air/Sea	10
3.3. JO FOA 2017 Land on border checks	10
3.4. Training	10
<b>4. Operational results</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Financial information</b>	<b>11</b>



## 1. Background information

The Rapid Border Intervention Exercise 2017 (REX 2017) was implemented in accordance with the Frontex Work Programme 2017 which identifies the establishment of the rapid reaction capacity as one of the main activities listed under the management of pooled resources (Strategic Action Area 2.4, Activity PRU-1a) and as per Articles 15 and 17 of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation (EBCG Regulation)<sup>1</sup>.

The REX 2017 was implemented from 04 October to 08 November 2017, at the EU's external land borders (border surveillance) between Bulgaria and Turkey and Bulgaria and Serbia, at the Border Crossing Points, at the airports as well as at the seaports. From 04 to 10 October 2017, Team Members were attending specialised training for profiles of Land Border Surveillance Officer and Second Line Officer. Deployment to the operational area and operational activities were carried out from 11 October (operational briefing) to 08 November (operational debriefing).

The operational aim of the exercise was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU's external land, sea and air borders in order to tackle the specific and disproportionate migration flow with the arrival at points of the external borders of large numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter the territory of Bulgaria without authorisation.

### 1.1. Brief risk assessment

#### *South Eastern Land Borders (border surveillance)*

At the Bulgarian land borders with Turkey and Serbia the total number of irregular migrant apprehensions during the implementation period of the REX exercise was 75 in 12 incidents. The Bulgarian land border with Turkey reported 20 irregular migrant apprehensions in 6 incidents while 55 irregular migrants were apprehended at the Bulgarian Serbian land border on exit in 6 incidents.

At the **Bulgarian-Serbian land border** the majority of the incident (4 incidents involving 33 migrants) were reported.

At the **Bulgarian-Turkish land border** 6 incidents involving the apprehension of 20 irregular migrants were reported.

Comparing the figures of migrant apprehensions at the **Bulgarian-Turkish and the Bulgarian-Serbian land border** sections with the figures reported during the same period in 2016 (1 874 migrant apprehensions) a **decrease of 96%** in terms of the number of migrant apprehensions was registered during the implementation of the REX exercise in 2017.

#### *Focal Points Land*

During the period from 11 October to 8 November 2017, the active **Focal Points** reported **124 refusals of entry and 8 cases of smuggling of goods** (23 900 pieces of cigarettes). In addition, the confiscation of **86.3 kg of ecstasy** (in the form of pills) hidden in a car was reported.

A total of **37 incidents** involving the apprehension of **110 persons** were reported at the **Bulgarian-Turkish border BCPs**. Of these incidents, 31 related to persons refused entry, 4 were associated with the smuggling

---

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard

of goods, one was reported as other (stolen registration plate) and one as an attempt of illegal border-crossing by avoiding border checks.

In total, **124 persons** were refused entry at the **Focal Points**. The main reasons for issuing refusals of entry were: having already stayed for three months during the preceding six-month period on the territory of the Member States of the European Union (50%), not having a valid visa or residence permit (36%) and not having appropriate documentation justifying the purpose and conditions of stay (6%).

With regard to smuggling of goods cases, there were **8 incidents of cigarette smuggling** reported in which number of detected cigarettes amounted to 11 100 pieces.

In addition one incident involving **8 clandestine migrants** hidden in the cargo compartment of a lorry was reported.

Moreover, according to daily reports shared within the REX 2017, Bulgarian customs officers discovered 2 kilograms of gold in the possession of a person during routine border checks of a bus transiting Bulgaria. One of the second-line officers also discovered EUR 17 600 hidden inside a small bag on the same bus.

### ***Focal Points Air***

During the implementation of the REX exercise **only one airport reported incidents in JORA**. In total, nine incidents were reported between 11 October and 8 November 2017.

At the airports **5 persons were refused entry**. Some of these migrants were reported as being in possession of abused travel documents such as one counterfeit Syrian passport and one counterfeit Romanian identity card. In addition, the airport authorities arrested two migrants, who were in possession of counterfeit travel documents.

### ***Focal Points Sea***

The seaports did not report incidents during the period of the implementation of the REX exercise.

## **1.2. Operational aim**

### **1.2.1. REX 2017 Operational aim**

The operational aim of the REX 2017 was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU external land, sea and air borders in order to tackle the specific and disproportionate migration flow with the arrival at points of the external borders of large numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter the territory of Bulgaria without authorisation. The exercise was based on the fictitious scenario, however it was intended to fill in the gaps of human resources and technical equipment in the ongoing Frontex operational activities in Bulgaria.

The Operational objectives were to enhance border security, provide technical and operational assistance in SAR cases, support Bulgaria in carrying out coast guard functions, enhance operational cooperation, enhance exchange of information, identify possible risks and threats and establish and exchange best practices.

### **1.2.2. Rapid Border Intervention exercise aim**

An overall objective of a rapid border intervention exercise is to test and contribute to increasing Frontex and MS/SAC readiness for deploying a rapid border intervention. Consequently, and in line with the new concept defined by Frontex in 2017, the REX 2017 was aiming at:

## FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

1. enhancing the awareness of and testing the implementation of the existing rapid border intervention mechanism,
2. increasing the number of the members of the rapid reaction pool with relevant training and operational experience,
3. reinforcing the ongoing operational activities by deployment of the members of the rapid reaction pool and technical equipment from the rapid reaction equipment pool to a relevant operational area.

The implementation of the operational activities which are subject to this evaluation report was linked to all objectives listed above. It should be however underlined that the evaluation of achievement of the goals of REX 2017 in chapter 2 of this report focuses only on the assessment of the overall goal specified in point 3 which is directly related to the activities implemented in the operational area in accordance with the Rapid Border Exercise 2017 Operational Plan approved on the 27 September 2017. The analysis of the goals 1 and 2 and related specific issues connected to the concept of the exercise and the application of the rapid reaction mechanism as such is out of scope of this evaluation and is addressed separately in detail in an overall evaluation report of REX 2017 drafted by the Pooled Resources Unit against the objectives formulated in REX 2017 activity initiation template approved on the 08 August 2017.

### 1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

REX 2017 was implemented from the 04 October to 08 November 2017. The exercise took place in Bulgaria, at its air border, land borders with Turkey and Serbia, and sea border. Prior to the deployment in the operational area for border control activities, the Team Members (TM) were provided with Land Border Surveillance Officers (BSO) Training (for Border Surveillance Officers) and Second Line Officers (SLO) Training for experts with profiles Advanced Level Document Expert (ALDO), Stolen Vehicle Detection Officer (SVDO) or Second-line Officer (SLO) (for Team Members deployed in Focal Points). Training was conducted from 04 October 2017 to 10 October 2017 in Bulgaria.

### 1.4. Participants

Following the updated concept of the exercise, the request for resources prior to the training and deployment phases consisted of two parts:

1. Request related to the availability check of resources in the rapid reaction pools - the MS were expected to confirm the availability of experts from the rapid reaction pool and technical equipment from the rapid reaction equipment pool. The request was addressed to all MS contributing to the rapid pools (except to the Host Member State).
2. Request related to the availability check and preparation of deployment of experts from the rapid reaction pool and technical equipment items from the rapid reaction equipment pool. The request was addressed to 16 MS that confirmed their interest in training and deploying their experts in advance; finally 14 MS participated.

The participating MS were Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland.

Direct involvement of third countries in the REX 2017 was not foreseen. Nevertheless in the framework of the bilateral cooperation between Bulgaria and Turkey and based on the Memorandum of Understanding on establishing cooperation between Frontex and Turkey, Turkish authorities were informed about the implementation of the REX 2017.

## 2. Achievement of objectives

### 2.1. Operational objectives

#### 2.1.1. Enhance border security

The additional Team Members deployed during the Rapid Border Intervention Exercise at land air and sea borders supported the national authorities to better survey specific areas at risk along the border between Bulgaria and Turkey and Bulgaria and Serbia and enhanced border security at Focal Points (land, air and sea).

The use of the technical equipment deployed in Bulgaria has been carried out according to their technical capabilities, the operational need and the intelligence collected.

Team Members were integrated in daily shifts increasing the manpower, providing operational support to the Bulgarian authorities.

- The objective was **achieved**.

#### 2.1.2. Provide technical and operational assistance in SAR cases

Deployed technical means for the sea border surveillance had adequate capacity to effectively support the SAR activities that would have been requested by the Varna Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre. Despite the fact that there were no SAR cases during the operational period of REX 2017, several exercises on SAR procedures were conducted, practically demonstrating full preparedness of the participants in case of a need.

- The objective was **achieved**.

#### 2.1.3. Support MS in carrying out coast guard functions

In the framework of REX 2017, Multipurpose Operational Activities (MOA) with support to the national authorities carrying out Coast Guard Functions were delivered. During the REX 2017 common activities for sea border surveillance and fisheries control activities with mixed crews including EFCA representatives were performed.

- The objective was **achieved**.

#### 2.1.4. Enhance operational cooperation

The objective was pursued through the involvement of great number of participating countries and experts. Deployed experts were fully integrated in the ongoing JO FOA 2017 BCU and JO FP 2017 Land, thus enhancing the cooperation between experts from different home MS's as well as the cooperation of Team Members with the local officers of the hosting authorities.

The participation of third countries in REX 2017 was not envisaged, however Turkish and Serbian authorities were dully notified of the exercise taking place at their borders with Bulgaria.

Additional deployment of human and technical resources enhanced the capacity of hosting authorities in coordinating additional personnel and equipment within joint activity and integrating them into the national structure.

- The objective was **achieved**.

## 2.1.5. Enhance exchange of information

Reporting structure was well in place since the beginning of the exercise and was fully integrated in JO FOA 2017 BCU reporting structure. ICC Sofia submitted on daily basis (Monday to Saturday) with the Daily ICC Report. Daily videoconference between all LCCs and the ICC Sofia proved useful for the information sharing and improved daily planning of the operational activities.

The introduction of JORA reporting, including Focal Points land, Focal Points air and Focal Points Sea went well without any major difficulty. However, it is worth noting that there were some delays in the reporting of incidents from operational areas during the implementation of the REX 2017. The quality of the submitted data in incident reports was good.

- The objective was **achieved**.

## 2.1.6. Identify possible risks and threats

The information and additional intelligence concerning routes and modus operandi as well as people smuggling and criminal networks involved in smuggling irregular migrants was gathered mainly from the interviews conducted with the migrants apprehended in the operational area within the framework of the ongoing JO FOA 2017 land SE.

For the enhanced situational awareness, Eurosur Fusion Services were activated and available during the REX 2017.

At the air borders all risks and threats affecting the participating airports, which were identified prior to the REX 2017, were confirmed during the implementation period. REX 2017 activities and prepared reports contributed to better and more thorough understanding of the targeted phenomena at each airport.

- The objective was **achieved**.

## 2.1.7. Establish and exchange best practices

Operational briefing and debriefing were integral part of the exercise in order to ensure all participants familiarization with the operational area and exercise aims. Both activities were incorporated with JO FOA 2017 BCU rotation periods, allowing for the better integration of the REX 2017 Team Members in the ongoing Frontex operational activities.

Daily video conference between ICC and LCCs, as well as weekly video conference with participation of the Frontex headquarters, enabled smooth performing of daily operational activities as well as contributed to more effective planning.

Two FOC (one for land and one for sea border activities) were continuously present in the operational area, ensuring the immediate solving of organizational and operational issues.

REX 2017 has also increased operational cooperation among all involved Bulgarian authorities responsible for sea border matters as well as Home MS authorities by delivering briefings, debriefings and tailored workshops.

Medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), search and rescue (SAR), boarding and evidence collection from migrants' boat exercises were organized within REX 2017 based on Boarding in Frontex coordinated Joint maritime operations: guidelines and best practices Handbook. This contributed to foster the cooperation among all actors at sea.



Focal Points are used as a permanent platform for the exchange of operational information, professional experiences as well as for best practices. Before deployments in the operational area Team Members attended a Second Line Officer profile training together with Team Members deployed at sea and land borders.

All participants were requested to send the participants report after finishing their deployment in order to provide feedback on their participation. All reports were received within the time limit, foreseen in the operational plan and were in general very positive.

- The objective was **partially achieved**.

## 2.2. Rapid border intervention exercise objectives

### 2.2.1. Enhance the awareness of and test the implementation of the existing rapid border intervention mechanism<sup>2</sup>

The exercise was carried out in accordance with the provisions of Article 17 of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation and initiated on 20 September 2017 with a fictional request for a rapid border intervention addressed to Frontex by the Host Member State (Bulgaria) and the consequent activation of the rapid reaction mechanism and application of relevant procedures leading to the ultimate deployment of human resources from the rapid reaction pool and equipment from the rapid reaction equipment pool as of 04 October 2017. The exercise required participation of representatives of all Frontex units routinely involved in the activation of the rapid intervention mechanism and relevant stakeholders in the MS/SAC.

- The objective was **achieved**.

### 2.2.2. Increase the number of members of the rapid reaction pool with relevant training and operational experience

Aimed to increase the effectiveness of multinational forces and their ability to carry out effectively the assigned duties during the rapid intervention, also specialised training courses were included into REX 2017. Two kinds of profile courses targeting selected profiles were offered to team members. The Land Border Surveillance Officers Training and Ad-hoc Training for Second Line Officers aimed to improve capability, capacity, and performance of the explicit group of members of rapid reaction pool. Both pre-deployment courses were highly interactive, and enabled participants to gain practical experience of applying best practice techniques and a proper professional behaviour required during rapid deployment. Numerous simulated activities and scenario based exercises supported enhancement and fixing of acquired knowledge. This approach intended to prepare officers for their upcoming duties during deployment to the rapid reaction activity.

- The objective was **achieved**.

### 2.2.3. Reinforcing the ongoing operational activities

During REX 2017, Member States in coordination by Frontex successfully deployed experts from the rapid reaction pool as well as technical equipment from the rapid reaction equipment pool for border control activities at the land, air and sea borders.

---

<sup>2</sup> As mentioned under point 1.2.2, a detailed analysis of this objective is out of scope of this evaluation and is addressed separately in detail in an overall evaluation report of REX 2017 drafted by the Pooled Resources Unit and based on the objectives formulated in REX 2017 activity initiation template.

As regards operational objectives specific for a rapid border exercise, additional to the operational aims characteristic of regular operational activity, REX 2017 provided an opportunity for the HMS to verify the capacity to integrate an increased number of technical equipment and human resources into the ongoing activities under own control and command structures and within the existing technical and logistical constraints.

- The objective was **achieved**.

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

#### **3.1. JO FOA 2017 Land on Border Surveillance**

Based on the experience from previous REX exercises, 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. REX 2017 was integrated in the existing land borders operations in Bulgaria, namely JO FOA 2017 BCU and JO FP 2017 Land. Integration proved to be very successful.

All deployed Team Members and technical equipment were fully integrated into the work of Border control units (BCU) and Border crossing points (BCP) with the experts deployed under two abovementioned Joint Operations.

#### **3.2. JO Focal Points 2017 Land/Air/Sea**

The Focal Points operational concept supplemented the activities performed under the exercise 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 or Seconded Team Members deployed to Frontex joint operations is an important part of effective information exchange. During the implementation phase of the REX 2017, the team members deployed in the area exchanged information by providing shift reports which were shared through established reporting channels.

The support provided by Team Members was highly appreciated and proved to be a useful tool for exchanging information and carrying out daily tasks.

#### **3.3. JO FOA 2017 Land on border checks**

Team Members seconded to the Agency participating in JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on Border Checks contributed to the ongoing operational activities of REX 2017 and participated in the briefing, debriefing and LCC meetings. They were also involved in the reporting structure of the REX 2017 via the established LCCs.

#### **3.4. Training**

Prior deployment in the operational area for border control activities, the Team Members attended and successfully completed one of the following trainings relevant for their profile, designed to match the foreseen tasks during the deployment phase:

- Land Border Surveillance Officers Training
- Ad-hoc Training for Second Line Officers

Both training courses lasted four and a half working days and aimed at improving the capacity of the Rapid reaction pool members to perform assigned tasks during the upcoming deployment. Participants were highly motivated and committed to receiving new competences and sharing the best practices from their working experience.

## 4. Operational results

The operational part of REX 2017 was launched on 11 October 2017 and was scheduled to run until 08 November 2017. The operational aim of the exercise was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU's external land, sea and air borders in order to tackle the specific and disproportionate migration flow with the arrival at points of the external borders of large numbers of third-country nationals trying to enter the territory of Bulgaria without authorisation.

Its operational aim was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU's external border of the south-eastern region in order to control the flow of irregular migrants permeating the borders of EU Member States 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.

The operational results of the REX 2017 refer only to the incidents which occurred in the period of implementation of the exercise at Bulgaria's green borders with Turkey and Serbia, at the activated Bulgarian airports and seaports..

During the implementation of the REX 2017 the following operational results were reported (according to JORA):

- 74 incidents were reported (land/air/sea)
- 75 irregular migrants were apprehended
- 8 clandestine migrants were detected
- 129 refusals of entry were issued
- 2 counterfeit documents were detected
- 1 people smuggler was arrested
- 23 900 pieces of cigarettes were seized
- 86 kg of ecstasy (pills) were seized
- 1 stolen vehicle was seized

## 5. Financial information

**Final Budget:** 689 283.60 EUR

**Total Commitment:** 681 852.98 EUR with 18 SFD issued

**Budget consumed** (pre-financing + final payments): 305 365.15 EUR

**Reimbursement to participants:** 1 625.72 EUR

**Total Paid:** 306 990.87 EUR

**Open amount** (for payment): 374 862.11 EUR

**Consumption level:** 45% (budget consumed \*100/committed funds)

**Final payments processed:** 5 (SOP 13.12.2017)