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## NOTE

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From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on Frontiers / Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject:	Best practices in external sea border protection and possibly national concepts in the area of combating new threats at the borders

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### *Introduction*

Since the discussion during the first meeting of the Frontiers WP under the Polish Presidency on the challenges Member States face in the protection of land sections of the EU external border was assessed as useful and necessary, the Presidency would like to enable Member States to continue the discussion, this time with regard to maritime borders.

Maritime border protection in the EU is a complex, multi-layered effort involving national authorities, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and international cooperation mechanisms. Each Member State with external sea borders employs different approaches, depending on their geographic location, security threats, and political priorities.

In an era of evolving threats at sea borders, including illegal migration, migrant smuggling and human trafficking, drug smuggling, potential terrorist activities or hybrid threats, such as cyber-attacks targeting port infrastructure, Member States need to continuously adapt their border management strategies.

One of the most pressing challenges for maritime border protection is irregular migration, so the intention of the Presidency is to initiate a discussion on the challenges Member States face in that context. The Presidency aims to examine national policies on combating emerging threats, national legislation, and operational systems dedicated to those challenges, and discuss the role of technology and international collaboration in securing maritime borders, focusing on the illegal migration context.

Conflicts, economic instability, and environmental factors drive large-scale migration movements, often facilitated by organised criminal networks exploiting vulnerabilities of border controls. The EU's maritime borders, particularly in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, experience continuous pressure from migration movements. Managing migration is a challenge in such an environment, and requires a balance between humanitarian obligations, national security, geopolitical considerations and international legal frameworks.

As reported by Frontex, new data revealed a 38 % drop in irregular border crossings into the EU in 2024, with just over 239 000 crossings detected – the lowest level since 2021, although not all routes saw a decrease. The Canary Islands have experienced higher pressure via sea routes in the last months, with Frontex noting an 18 % increase in arrivals to almost 47 000, the highest figure since Frontex began collecting data in 2009.

Thus, there is a need to further deliberate on border protection practices to prevent threats at the external borders and examine how to effectively protect the territory of the European Union from illegal migration at its maritime borders in order to maintain a safe Schengen area.

### *Questions for discussion*

The Presidency invites delegations to reflect upon the following questions:

- 1. What are the greatest challenges that Member States face in the protection of the EU's external sea borders and what possible remedial actions could be taken in this regard (jointly or individually)?**
- 2. What innovative solutions are or could be implemented at sea borders to increase the effectiveness of their protection and security, in the context of the inflow of illegal migration?**