

Brussels, 28 January 2026
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From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on Frontiers / Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject:	Pact for the Mediterranean: initiatives and actions in the area of border security

In view of our meeting on the 5th of February 2026, the Presidency has prepared a discussion paper on the Pact for the Mediterranean, more specifically on the initiatives to be developed with third countries to strengthen border security.

Delegations are invited to reflect on the following topics and to contribute to a productive discussion during our meeting.

Cooperation with third countries under the Pact for the Mediterranean

Against the background of the Pact for the Mediterranean, adopted by the Commission in October 2025 and launched jointly with EU Member States and southern Mediterranean partners at the end of November, and taking into account ongoing work on the external dimension of EU migration and border management, the Presidency invites delegations to consider possible ways to further strengthen cooperation with third countries in the Mediterranean Region in the area of migration management and border security.

The Pact places security, preparedness and migration management at the core of the third pillar, underlining the importance of partnership-based cooperation, shared responsibility and full respect for international law. In a context marked by persistent illegal migration flows, maritime security

challenges and the continued activity of organised smuggling networks, effective engagement with key partner countries remains a strategic priority for the Union.

Common operations within the territorial waters of third countries

One possible area for enhanced cooperation concerns common patrolling activities carried out within the territorial waters of third countries, based on their consent and in line with international and EU law. In practical terms, this type of cooperation reflects a shared effort to address maritime security and migration challenges in the Mediterranean, rather than unilateral action by either side. Common patrolling can contribute to a better overview of movements at sea, support earlier identification of illegal departures and improve coordination between the authorities involved. Joint activities may also help disrupt smuggling networks and reduce risks for people undertaking dangerous sea crossings, while supporting effective search and rescue operations where needed.

At the same time, such cooperation requires clear and predictable arrangements, which could materialise through the negotiation of status agreements and/or working arrangements between the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) and the border management authorities of southern Mediterranean countries. Any common patrolling should be based on an agreed legal framework, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for all actors involved. Safeguards are needed to ensure full respect for international maritime law, including search and rescue obligations and the protection of fundamental rights.

The EBCG Regulation requires Status Agreements with third countries as the legal instrument when executive powers are to be exercised by FRONTEX in third countries. Status Agreements are EU agreements negotiated by the European Commission following an authorization by the Council.

Joint training , awareness raising and knowledge sharing with border authorities and coastguards of third countries

In several partner countries, limited resources and operational capacity and misalignment of priorities continue to pose challenges for effective border and maritime management. Joint training activities involving border and coast guards can help addressing existing gaps and challenges.

Joint training activities, developed in cooperation with EU agencies and Member States, can help strengthen practical skills in areas such as maritime operations, risk analysis, document checks and use of surveillance tools. In addition to technical skills, joint training can support closer day-to-day cooperation and promote shared working methods and standards, including respect for fundamental rights.

Awareness raising and knowledge sharing can further improve cooperation in this domain. Study visits and exchanges can be organised for middle to high-level management from border and coastguard authorities.

Investing in capacity building to strengthen border management capabilities of third countries

Targeted equipment support can address specific operational needs. To ensure long-term impact, such support should be accompanied by arrangements for maintenance, monitoring and accountability. This can help ensure that assistance remains effective over time and contributes to responsible and sustainable border management.

Beyond immediate operational cooperation, the Pact for the Mediterranean underlines the importance of sustained investment in capacity building aimed at strengthening the institutional and administrative capabilities of third countries. Effective and sustainable border management depends on sound governance structures, adequately trained personnel, inter-agency coordination and clear legal frameworks.

Capacity-building efforts could cover support for institutional development, the digitalisation of border management processes, the development of integrated border management strategies and closer cooperation along migratory routes. Such investments may contribute to greater resilience, reduce reliance on ad hoc measures and support a comprehensive approach that brings together security, migration management and development objectives, in line with the overall framework of the Pact.

FRONTEX already implements a technical assistance project in the Southern Neighbourhood. In this regard, the agency prioritises where and how it intervenes, aiming to offer technical assistance that is complementary to the Agency's operational priorities and the EU's long-term objectives in the region. Priority is given to sustainable solutions that facilitate interoperability with European IBM standards and promote the respect and protection of fundamental rights.

In view of the above, delegations are invited to reflect to the following questions:

Questions for discussion

1. Common patrolling:

- Would you support the development of FRONTEX Status Agreements or Working Arrangements with North African Countries and countries of the Middle East with the objective to initiate common maritime activities within the territorial waters of those third countries?
- Under what conditions and safeguards could common patrolling arrangements within the territorial waters of third countries be developed so as to enhance maritime security and migration management, while ensuring full respect for international law and fundamental rights?

2. Joint training :

- Do you support the idea of using EU funding to establish Regional Training Centers in the Mediterranean focusing on joint training programmes with personnel of border authorities of third countries?
- Would you consider that a more prominent role for FRONTEX in such trainings centers could maximise operational effectiveness, interoperability and sustainability?

3. Capacity building:

- Which capacity-building measures should be prioritised to strengthen the ability of third countries in the Mediterranean to effectively protect their Sea Borders and manage migration in a durable and rights-compliant manner?