

# Speech by Commissioner Avramopoulos at the Frontex Conference on the European Day for Border Guards, Warsaw Poland

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Warsaw, 21 May 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, it is with great enthusiasm that I speak here today to you, the 'professionals of border management', because we are at an important crossroad for the future of European borders. This year, we celebrate: 30 years of existence of the Schengen agreement, 20 years of the practical implementation of Schengen, and 10 years of existence of the Frontex Agency.

The creation of Frontex 10 years ago was the result of a common endeavour to strengthen the controls at the external borders in order to allow persons to cross the internal borders between Schengen States without border controls.

I believe this is one of the biggest achievements ever of the EU, as it touches upon the daily life of our citizens. Some amongst us will certainly remember the 'old days', when we were stopped at every border when going on holiday. We enjoy the freedom of free circulation in the Schengen area today and I think I can speak on behalf of everyone that we intend to keep this freedom in the future. Strong and secure external borders remains however a prerequisite for the free circulation of persons.

To defend this freedom, we need to take some bold decisions to address migratory challenges. That is what the Commission adopted on 13 May, a European Agenda on Migration. This Agenda is not an emergency response; it is a strategy that will lead us forward in the next five to ten years.

With the recent tragic events in the Mediterranean, we have witnessed that the management of external borders has increasingly become a shared responsibility. Frontex, as a coordinator, will play an essential role in its implementation. To address the crisis in the Mediterranean, the capacities and assets for the Frontex joint operations Triton and Poseidon were tripled for 2015

and 2016. Triton and Poseidon are therefore the biggest maritime joint operations ever coordinated by Frontex both in terms of allocated budget and the number of assets deployed.

We all know that every crisis will be different, but the EU needs to heed the lesson and be prepared to act in anticipation of a crisis, not just for reaction. I believe the overall effectiveness would be improved through greater cooperation. To address emergency situations, we are proposing 'Hot Spot teams' to give support on the ground in the Member States where the pressure is high. In this context, Frontex will help Member States by coordinating the return of irregular migrants.

Responding to crises is important; but anticipating crises is much more effective. Therefore, the identification of risk trends is increasingly necessary for effective operational preparedness. The roll-out of Eurosur has provided a good model on which to build. Eurosur should be fully utilized by all civilian and military authorities with a responsibility for maritime border surveillance.

Managing our borders more efficiently also implies making better use of the opportunities offered by modern and 'state of the art' IT systems and technologies. The EU today has also three large-scale IT systems, the use of which can bring benefits to border management. A new phase will come with the "Smart Borders" initiative. It will increase the efficiency of border management, and it will facilitate border crossings for the large majority of 'bona fide' third country travellers. At the same time, "Smart Borders" will strengthen the fight against irregular migration by creating a record of all cross-border movements by third country nationals, fully respecting proportionality.

Moreover, while the EU has common rules on return, it lacks effective operational cooperation. Frontex is currently offering considerable support to Member States, but its mandate must be reinforced to increase its capacity to provide comprehensive operational assistance. In 2016, the Commission will finally work together with you to come to a kind of Union standard for border management. This should cover all aspects of the Union's external border management at EU level and is also connected to serious security challenges.

The development of high standards inside the EU will make it easier for Europe to support third countries developing their own solutions to better manage their borders. Initiatives in key African and neighbourhood countries could be supported by the Frontex Agency in the framework of technical assistance projects. Concerning our relations with third countries, the goal should be to encourage more secure borders, but also to strengthen the capacity of countries in North Africa to intervene and save lives of migrants in distress.

The ongoing evaluation of Frontex activities should also identify the limitations and shortcomings that will have to be addressed in the medium and long term development of the Agency. When speaking about the future of border management, one of the issues that we will explore is the possible creation of a European System of Border Guards.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to those who have elaborated the Schengen system, to those who have implemented it, and to those who are building now new initiatives to develop it further. We are living today in a European context of stability with rights and freedoms. But we should not forget that others people in other parts of the world, not far away from the EU, are fleeing from war and conflicts. The work we are doing together is not only beneficial for the freedom of our citizens. It should also address the needs of those seeking protection in the EU. Let us keep this in mind when we work together to keep the success of free circulation within the EU based on well managed and secure external borders.

Thank you.

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