



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 20 March 2020
(OR. en)

6941/20

LIMITE

**FRONT 61
COMIX 120**

NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Communication on Frontex operational prioritization related to the COVID-19 outbreak

Delegations will find enclosed a communication on Frontex operational prioritization related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

E-MAIL



IR 002936 2020
17.03.2020

Ref: CAB/ANRA/3030/2020

Warsaw, 17 March 2020

To the Members of the Management Board
of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, remains committed to working with EU Member States and Schengen-Associated Countries to help protect our common external borders amid the COVID-19 outbreak. While doing so, I want to stress that our priority is to ensure the health of all our staff and officers deployed to our operations.

To contain the spread of the virus and ensure business continuity, last week we have set up Frontex Crisis Response Team, which assesses the rapidly developing situation and coordinates under my leadership the Frontex response and the measures to be undertaken. I can assure you that we are working on all fronts to tackle the spread of, and to minimise the potential impact of COVID-19, in line with the recommendations of relevant national and European sanitary authorities.

As regards operational activity, the Agency continues to carry out our field deployments: last week Frontex contributed more than 100 officers to the Greek land border as part of the Rapid Border Intervention Evros 2020, increasing the overall number of officers currently deployed by the Agency in Greece to more than 600.

Frontex is relying on the tools successfully developed for several years, such as the Maritime Aerial Surveillance (MAS) planes, to provide continued support to Member States at their external borders.

Frontex experts keep supporting Member States, Schengen Associated Countries, the European Commission and other EU agencies with analytical products, providing daily reports on the situation at the Greek-Turkish border, on COVID-19, ad-hoc reports on other exceptional situations as well as satellite imagery of pre-frontier areas.

While we fully understand your concerns with the future deployment of officers, we do count on your full support to ensure the safety of EU's external borders, especially taking into account the evolving challenges they face, as well as relevant COVID-19 prevention measures that are implemented in our operational areas. We are permanently monitoring the level of protective gear stocks with the aim to guarantee its full availability throughout the deployment periods.

Below you will find the operational priorities we have identified:

1. JOINT OPERATIONS:

TOP PRIORITIES: RBI Evros and RBI Aegean and JO Poseidon

These operations are considered most critical, due to the ongoing situation at the Greek - Turkish Land and Sea borders and to the nature of the Rapid Border Interventions, including the legal obligation for Frontex and the Member States (MS) to provide support.

The proposed way forward:

- No reduction to the deployment levels;
- Request for MSs to extend currently deployed Team Members (TM) for additional month - Period 3 (if not already planned for 2 periods).

These measures enable ensuring continuation of the operational support to Greece, reducing the risks associated with officers traveling for rotation. Locally all protective measures and support to the deployed officers is ensured by Agency staff.

SECONDARY PRIORITIES:

Activities considered relevant to keep, in order to maintain general support to MS still facing challenges at their external borders.

JO FOA Land and JO FOA WB

Proposal for MSs to extend currently deployed TM for one additional month - Period 3 (if not already planned for 2 periods)

JO Themis

Deployments planned for Period 3 are suspended. Operational support will continue with the extended TM from Period 2, which have been relocated to two locations: Lampedusa, Catania.

JO Indalo

Deployments planned for Period 3 and Period 4 are suspended. Operational support to continue with extended TM from Period 2.

OTHER OPERATIONS:

Activities that have been deprioritized, considering the current circumstances and restrictions.

JO Focal Points Air and Land - JO Coordination Points Air and Land

Immediate suspension of all activities, considered as low priority, until further notice. Terminate the current deployments in order to return officers home if traveling is possible.

Other operational activities planned to be initiated in Period 3, or next month of April, are suspended until further notice.

2. RETURN:

TOP PRIORITY: Readmission and Return from Greece

Considering the above-mentioned need for the continuation of the Joint Operations in Greece (including Rapid Border Intervention), associated with the current situation of migrants in Greek territory, assistance in readmission and return from Greece is also one of the critical functions to be continued and strengthened.

The proposed way forward:

- Support Greece in the area of readmission from Greece to Turkey. Request for MSs to extend currently deployed TM for additional month - Period 3.
- Return based on the agreed COM-Frontex Action Plan. Assistance with scheduled flights available. Other practical arrangements for return operations still under discussion with Greek authorities, will be communicated as soon as finalized.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

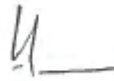
Return operations by charter and scheduled flights

Frontex remains available to support MSs in these activities, including assistance in cancelling and rebooking increasing number of return operations by scheduled flights affected by COVID-19.

Any other activities in the area of return are suspended until further notice.

As a general note, maintaining the deployed officers in the operational areas from Period 2 to Period 3 ensures the operational capacity of the Agency to support MS in need and reduces the risks associated to traveling from and to these areas.

Sincerely yours,



Fabrice Leggeri
Executive Director