

In this issue:

- 2 Land-to-Sea Shift Continues in Greece
- 4 Man against Machine
- 7 Report Assesses Progress on Treatment of Solo Minors
- 8 EU Anti-Trafficking Day
- 10 FRAN Quarterly Q2 2012
- 11 Consultative Forum
- 12 Australia Moves Ahead with Offshoring



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Pro-Syria demonstration in Beirut, Lebanon.

Syria War to Spread?

The EU joined a diplomatic chorus urging restraint in the Middle East in October as the civil war in Syria showed signs of escalating throughout the region. Even as a ceasefire brokered by UN/Arab League envoy Lakhdar Brahimi failed to materialise, world leaders and the UN remained divided over how best to contain the conflict.

The main catalyst for international concern was a flare-up of violence in neighbouring Lebanon after a bomb in the capital Beirut killed a senior government official. The death of internal security chief Wissam al-Hassan was

perceived by the US as a risk to stability through creation of a power vacuum in Lebanon as well as deepening sectarian divisions within the country.

Sporadic gunfights broke out in Beirut and Tripoli after al-Hassan's funeral became a public protest that caused at least 11 deaths and led Prime Minister Najib Azmi Mikati – whose Hezbollah allies support Syria's Assad government – to offer his resignation. Although the offer was declined by President Michel Suleiman, the Lebanese army stepped into the fray, adding their voice to calls for restraint warning that it would respond “to stamp out any security viola-

tion and safeguard national peace” if a “red line” were crossed.

“We call on all political leaders to be cautious when expressing their stances and opinions [...] because the fate of the country is on the line,” the army announced in a public statement. “The army leadership reiterates, by action not words, that security is a red line, and likewise the targeting of official institutions and violation of private and public property.”

The warning came as Lakhdar Brahimi claimed to have Syrian government support for a ceasefire during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, which failed to take hold. The envoy's hope was that any ceasefire, however brief, might create a window of opportunity to build a more durable truce. However Brahimi himself had earlier described the chances of that as “microscopic.”

Regional threats

But while the UN was drawing up contingency plans for a peacekeeping force to shore up any cessation in fighting, warnings of the threat to regional stability were becoming increasingly vocal. Both before and after the Beirut bombing, for which the Lebanese opposition squarely blamed Syrian provocateurs, key opposition figures in Lebanon received death threats according to a report in Al Jazeera.

Ammar Houry, an MP with the anti-Assad opposition movement of Saad al-Hariri, told Al Jazeera, “on the eve of the attack, we received an SMS from a Syrian number that read: ‘Sons of bitches, we will get you one by one’ and afterwards, “we received a second SMS that read: ‘Con-

Continued on page 6 >>



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Greek Shift from Land to Sea Continues in October

The displacement of migratory pressure from the Greek-Turkish land border to the Aegean Islands has continued over the last month. Though down against August and September figures, detection rates of illegal border crossing at Greece's sea borders with Turkey were still markedly above the October totals for the past two years. Detections in the operational area of Joint Operation (JO) Poseidon Land stood at 21 for the first two weeks of October against 181 and 2,185 for the whole of September and August 2012 respectively. Meanwhile detections in JO Poseidon Sea were at 306 for the first half of October against 542 and 419 for September and August.

Also in early October, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström toured the land border re-

gion and visited migrant detention centres. She urged authorities to improve detention conditions on those Aegean islands experiencing a sudden upturn in arrivals following a crackdown in the Evros region. The islands of Lesbos, Samos, Patmos, Leros and Symi in particular reported increased migratory pressure from Turkey leading to formal requests both to Commissioner Malmström and to Frontex for increased assistance.

Later talks between Cecilia Malmström, Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras and Public Order Minister Nikos Dendias ended with agreement on ways forward in Greece's efforts to manage its migratory challenges.

The Commissioner said she would push for an increase in EU funding for the crackdown, from 75 percent to 95 percent

as well as ensuring that the Commission and Frontex would continue to support Greece in the area of return operations, both technically and financially, to further increase returns capacity.

In operational terms, supplementary assets from Frontex to bolster Greece's maritime borders will include the deployment of additional aerial assets, patrol boats, mobile surveillance units and expert guest officers for screening and debriefing of migrants. Joint Operation Poseidon Sea will also be extended to the end of 2012.

Fence almost ready

A barrier along the Greek-Turkish border intended to stem irregular migration in the Evros region will be fully operational by the end of October, according to Greek daily *Kathimerini*.

The paper cited "an official at the border crossing" as saying the three-meter-high fence topped with barbed wire, branded as "pointless" by European Commission official, was already half complete by mid-October.

In a related development, the AFP news agency reported that Greek authorities plan to provide shelter on the islands of Crete and Rhodes for as many as 20,000 Syrian refugees. Greece's public order ministry told AFP the move would fulfil Athens' human rights obligations under the United Nations charter. The operation is code-named Ioni after the first ancient Greek colony established in Syria.

A separate plan to convert disused barracks around Greece into migrant holding centres is already underway. ■

BRIEFS

Europol Recovers 160 Stolen Vehicles

On September 11 and 12, police officers from 20 EU countries met at Europol headquarters to coordinate "Operation Cycar," the purpose of which was to crack down on vehicle theft within the EU.

According to the www.infologue.com news portal, the successful operation saw 160 stolen vehicles recovered and 75 arrests across Europe. Final figures for the operation are expected to be even higher.

Operation Cycar was backed by various multilateral agencies, including Frontex.

Eastern Border Guards View Austrian Practices

Border guards and customs officers from Eastern Partnership countries visited Austria from September 3 to 7 as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, to familiarise themselves with best practices in the field of document authenticity verification.

The Belarusian BelTA news agency reported that the Belarusian officials, along with colleagues from other Eastern Partnership countries, participated in various seminars and were invited to visit border checkpoints and customs clearance facilities at Vienna International Airport.

The Eastern Partnership countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine

MPs Criticise UKBA Deficiencies

At a meeting of the British Parliament's home affairs committee, Rob White-man, chief executive of the UK Border Agency (UKBA), informed members of Parliament that the agency was taking action to determine the whereabouts of 174,000 people who have been denied permission to stay in the United Kingdom but have gone missing. Meanwhile, a government contract has been awarded to the service company Capita, which is to assist in clearing the backlog of migrants who have overstayed their visas. The contract is worth an estimated GBP 40 million, according to the BBC, and will run for four years. White-man explained that Capita would only be paid for results, that is, for the number of people the company is able to contact that subsequently leave the UK. Nevertheless, opposition Labour politicians criticised the UKBA for failing to define precise success criteria in awarding the contract and for a lack of transparency. The agency also came in for criticism from a second parliamentary committee. A report prepared by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) said the systems used by the UKBA to measure the number of students entering Britain to study had produced "chaos" resulting in many migrants who have no intention of studying applying for student visas to enable them to work illegally in the United Kingdom.

London University Appeals against UKBA Decision

A British university stripped of its right to sponsor international student visas pledged to defend its reputation in September.

Non-EU students at London Metropolitan University were granted a last-minute reprieve when a High Court judge granted those already in the UK with appropriate immigration status to continue with their studies pending a judicial review of the decision. But London Met was still left crying "foul" over the UK Border Agency (UKBA)'s unprecedented move to revoke its licence.

The UKBA found that in a sample group of foreign students at the university a quarter did not have permission to stay in the country. The agency accused the University of "serious and systemic failings" in its foreign student programmes. Some 2,600 non-EU students affected by the decision were initially given 60 days to find an alternative university to sponsor their stay, or face deportation. Meanwhile, as many as 500 students suspected of the most serious breaches faced immediate removal.

But Metropolitan University dismissed the UKBA's findings as incorrect.

"My university is going to seek for this revocation to be stayed [...] because our analysis with leading immigration lawyers demonstrates that this report of the UKBA is wrong," said Malcolm Gillies, the

institution's vice chancellor. "We fundamentally contest the claim that there is systemic failure here."

London Metropolitan hopes the legal challenge will at the very least prompt the agency to temporarily reverse its decision, thus granting students more time either to make alternative arrangements or finish their studies.

Students argue that finding a new university place at the start of the academic year is extremely difficult, and that people nearing the end of their courses risk having their academic career ruined by the UKBA's decision. Under the original ruling, any student who failed to find a new course faced the possibility of deportation and being banned from entering the UK for 10 years.

The loss of its licence could also deal a severe financial blow to the university. Mr Gillies said Metropolitan could lose GBP 30 million because of the move — around of a fifth of its budget — and that this threatens the institution's future.

The controversy surrounding London Metropolitan could also have implications for other British universities. Foreign students have long flocked to the UK, bringing in over GBP 2 billion a year according to UK daily *The Telegraph*, but the scandal might make people think about studying elsewhere. ■

BRIEFS

Poor Interpreters Put Asylum Seekers at Risk

An editorial in the Danish newspaper *Politiken* in September claimed the lack of formal training for interpreters in Denmark can lead to mistranslated interviews with asylum seekers. The editorial's authors, parliamentarian Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen and Michala Clante Bendixen of Refugees Welcome, said asylum seekers risk having their applications rejected if, for example, the three interviews they give to the police, the immigration service and Refugee Appeals Board appear to deviate because of poor interpreting.

Libya in Border Security Talks With EU States

The new Libyan government is holding talks with at least three European governments on the procurement of sensors and other equipment needed to secure its borders.

According to the website www.defensenews.com, Libya has been talking to Britain, France and Italy on government-to-government arrangements, and companies such as EADS Cassidian, Finmeccanica, Thales, BAE Systems, KBR, QinetiQ and General Dynamics are expected to bid for contracts once the Libyans specify their needs.

Spotting Deception: Man against Machine

What is the best way to spot a lie? It is one of the fundamental elements of interviewing. But how effective are standard procedures at the border, and can machines do a better job of it than people? A Frontex research project with the Royal Dutch Marechaussee (the Dutch Military Police/KMar) sought answers to these questions and more in September.

The team conducted a simulation exercise in order to better understand how border guards take decisions in a scenario of “unknown threats” (i.e. no database hit, no fraudulent documents). The exercise was part of a broader research project aimed at studying the effectiveness of first-line border control in making the right decision when sending passengers to the second line for more detailed questioning, and the factors that affect performance.

The subject is particularly challenging because no operational or statistical measures exist that account for “false acceptance” or the number of passengers with false documents, false identity, illegitimate purpose or representing a risk or threat who manage to cross undetected. The team tested the “Avatar” system developed by BORDERS – a US Department of Homeland Security Centre of Excellence in Border Security based at the University of Arizona.

The Avatar (Automated Virtual Agent for Truth Assessments in Real-time) is a

prototype system resulting from research in contact-less sensors, decision support, and deception detection being tested by the US Customs and Border Protection for screening applicants to SENTRI, a Trusted Traveller Programme, at the De Concini Port of Entry at the US-Mexican border.

The exercise took place at the KMar Border Security Training Center in Apeldoorn and pitted the skills of border guard experts from 14 Schengen Member States performing spotting, first- and second-line checks against the Avatar. The goal was to correctly identify the threats based solely on a given scenario and profiles distributed during a briefing.

The aim was to better understand what makes border guards suspicious (what physio-behavioral cues border guards pay attention to in order to make a quick decision), how the machine performs in assessing credibility, and whether border guards can make better decisions with the help of the machine.

The scenario

Because it is difficult to design a realistic role-playing scenario in which participants do not lie by default or in which authentic participants (e.g. smugglers, terrorists or other criminals) can be hired,

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a scenario was developed using extreme soccer fanaticism as a realistic proxy for other types of deeply held beliefs such as religious, political, or national allegiance. A Joint Operation (JO) called “Champions League 2012” was thus designed, closely following the model of the real JO Euro-cup 2012.

The scenario saw two Dutch teams — Ajax Amsterdam and Feyernoord Rotterdam — having both qualified for a Champions League Final match to be held at Wembley Stadium in London. The deployment of the simulated Joint Operation was motivated by the risk that suspected hooligans (not on the watchlist) would try to mix with real Dutch supporters to attend the match. In addition, a specific Dutch hooligan group was sus-

pected to have joined forces with a well-known British neo-Nazi movement and to be using the match as a cover to enter the UK and attack an important international governmental meeting on migration.

The role of passengers was played by KMar cadets/students, who were surveyed to assign them roles that most closely fitted their true personality profile (and any real team allegiances) so that their physio-behavioural reactions would be as realistic as possible. Of 94 subjects, 29 were selected to play the role of hooligans with approximately half scoring very high in terms of “fandom” and attitudes to extremism, while a similarly sized sample with lower scores was chosen as a control group. The task of the selected students was to lie when asked about which team they supported. For example, if a student declared in the survey

to be an Ajax fan, he/she would be asked to play the role of a supporter of Feyernoord. The rest of the students were not asked to lie and did not know the details of the scenario. In addition, four of the 29 were given additional information about the neo-Nazi group and the planned attack and were shown symbols and photos of leaders and venues. Their task was to conceal information and, if asked, to deny they knew anything at all.

Information Vs Reactions

Despite limitations due to the nature of role-playing, eight of the 29 passengers lying and one in four of the “hooligans” concealing information were correctly identified and stopped by the border guards in the second line. An additional nine were correctly suspected by the spotters and first-line officers and were referred to the second line but were subsequently released. This gives more or less an accuracy of 25% true positives. The avatar also interviewed the cadets and captured some 70-75% of the deceivers (true positives). A closer inspection of the processes at work is even more revealing. While border guards seemed to focus primarily on consistency of information, the machine was totally information blind, focussing only on physiological-behavioural reactions including gaze, pupil dilation and voice changes. The exercise and the results were instrumental in eliciting discussions on the role of technology in border checks, the importance of profiling and experience, and how subjectivity affects decision-making. ■

BRIEFS

Belarusian Major Tried for People Smuggling

A major in the Belarusian border guard identified only as Aliaksandr P is to be tried at the Regional Court in Suwalki, Poland, in connection with allegedly smuggling more than 1,300 people across the Polish-Belarusian border between 2000 and 2008.

According to a report carried on the portal of Polish weekly *Wprost*, the Belarusian major was part of an organised gang that assisted migrants from Vietnam, China and Afghanistan to enter Poland illegally.

Bulgaria To Open Two New BCPs with Romania

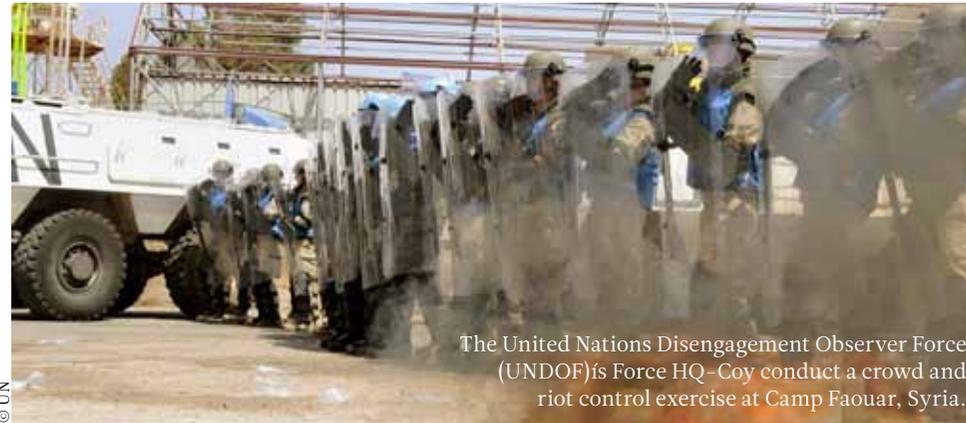
The Bulgarian government approved the launch of two new border checkpoints on the country's land border with Romania, Bulgarian news agency Novinite reported.

One will connect the Bulgarian village of Krushari to Romania's Dobromir and the other will connect the Bulgarian village of Kaynardzha to Romania's Lipnita.

Funding for the construction of the border crossing points will be provided under the EU's 2007-2013 Romanian-Bulgarian cross-border cooperation programme.

UK To Deport Failed Sri Lankan Asylum Seekers Despite Torture Concerns

British authorities intend to forcibly return hundreds of failed Sri Lankan asylum seekers to their home country despite evidence gathered by human rights groups suggesting that many may be tortured on their return. UK daily *The Independent* reported that the British Border and Immigration Agency has commissioned a number of charter flights to transport as many as 300 people to Colombo in the coming weeks. According to Human Rights Watch, those most at risk of being subjected to interrogation and torture are members of the Tamil minority. The Sri Lankan Government continues to be concerned about returning citizens who may have had links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil insurgency group, which was finally defeated in 2009 and received funding and support from British Tamils. Despite assurances given by the UK Border Agency that only individuals who do not require international protection are to be expelled, British judges intervened twice this year to issue injunctions preventing the deportation of people who, they found, might have become victims of torture if they were returned to Sri Lanka.



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The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is Force HQ-Coy conduct a crowd and riot control exercise at Camp Faouar, Syria.

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gratulations, the countdown has begun. One of 10 eliminated.”

But fears of a regional escalation were not limited to Lebanon. In an exclusive interview for UK daily *The Guardian* in Istanbul in late October, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu called on the international community to prevent humanitarian disaster, primarily in Syria itself where as many as two million are internally displaced with winter approaching, but also to prevent the conflict igniting into a region-wide conflagration.

Underlining the fact that at least 32,000 people have already died during the 20-months of violence, Davutoğlu said the crisis had gone on for long enough and that the pleas of the Syrian people could no longer be ignored.

“How long can this situation continue?” he asked. “I mean in Bosnia, now we have Ban Ki-moon [the UN secretary general] apologising 20 years after. Who will apologise for Syria in 20 years’ time? How can we stay idle?”

A week earlier, Syrian shelling had killed five Turkish civilians in the town of Akçakale, triggering a week of cross-border exchanges of fire and fears of all-out war. Turkey also forced down an aircraft flying from Russia to Syria in October accusing it of carrying illicit military hardware.

Turkey had earlier called for a buffer zone along its border with Syria as well as safe havens for Syrian refugees within Syria, to be protected by international forces. Ankara has emphasised however that it will not act unilaterally against its neighbour and former ally and that any action must be undertaken with the full support of the UN Security Council; support which thus far has been lacking due to persistent vetoes to Council Resolutions by China and Russia.

However in the *Guardian* interview Davutoğlu played instead on world leaders’ human conscience. “We are calling for an international humanitarian mission to go into Syria and be protected to stop the refugee flow,” he said. “[...] These people are human beings. The winter is approaching. How will they survive the winter?” ■

BRIEFS

Bulgaria Launches New Surveillance System

Tsvetan Tsvetanov, the Bulgarian deputy prime minister and minister of interior affairs, attended a ceremony held at the border police headquarters in Svilengrad to officially launch an integrated control and surveillance system for monitoring activity on the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

According to a press release issued by the Bulgarian Interior Ministry, the decision to implement the system underscores Bulgaria’s commitment to providing a reliable external border for the European Union.

Eastern Neighbourhood to Receive Funding Boost

The European Commission approved a new support package of just over EUR 23 million for the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood programme on September 25. According to a report on the *Europolitics* news portal, the purpose of the programme is to improve security, boost trade and increase mobility for people living in the region.

This is intended to be achieved by implementing border management rules and adopting best practices on the Armenian-Georgian and Ukrainian-Belarusian borders in line with EU standards.



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Report Assesses Progress on Unaccompanied Minors

A mid-term report published in September by the European Commission evaluated progress to date on an Action Plan on the treatment of unaccompanied children in migration, adopted in 2010.

Despite many positive developments at policy and legislative level, the report concedes that accurate figures into lone children in migrant flows are still lacking.

“The most reliable data available are those on unaccompanied minors who applied for asylum,” the report admits, citing 2011 figures when 12,225 applications were received from migrant children in the 27 Member States, a number comparable to previous years.

But while these account for only a small proportion of all minors in an irregular migratory situation, it is a sustained trend: “The arrival of unaccompanied children on EU territory is not a temporary development, but a long-term feature of migration into the EU.”

Commenting on the report in an opinion article reproduced in a number of European publications, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström wrote that the EU still has a long way to go and that, “much more can be done to give all unaccompanied children the reception they deserve.” Entitled “Stand up for the unaccompanied children,” the article starts:

“A society is judged by how well it treats its most vulnerable people. The unaccompanied children who arrive at European borders are among the most vulnerable and exposed individuals. They travel without parents or guardians, often fleeing violence and conflict. How do we treat them? Not nearly as well as we should.”

Furthermore, the Commissioner states that, “border staff and authorities in all EU countries need to receive training on how to sensitively deal with children who have escaped the horrors of war.” And while recognising that many EU countries have taken steps to improve conditions, “EU states should now share such experiences and learn from each other’s successes.”

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights are at the heart of all EU action concerning unaccompanied minors, according to the European Commission. “This means that each unaccompanied minor must be seen as being a child before being a migrant and that particular consideration must be given to his particular circumstances. As soon as a young person is identified and suspected to be an isolated minor, authorities have to provide immediate protection and care.”

The mid-term report found that over the last two years the Action Plan has had a positive impact in terms of: Recognition of the best interests of the child as the guiding principle, which has contributed to increased protection in the new EU legislation; a common EU approach, ensuring greater prominence being given to funding, and the facilitation of discussions

between stakeholders and enhanced exchange of knowledge and practices.

When it comes to specific procedures however, such as assessing a migrant’s age, standards are still inadequate in Cecilia Malmström’s view.

“Another challenge is to determine the age of the unaccompanied children,” she wrote. “Whichever technique is used – examining bone structure, teeth and wrists, or interviews – these procedures can be a difficult process for the child. European countries have begun to exchange their experiences and best practice, promoting child-friendly techniques, but more can and should be done.”

The evaluation report itself also identifies areas where more effort is required. These include: The gathering and exchange of quantitative and qualitative data, concerning for instance the numbers of minors disappearing from care facilities or the numbers of returned unaccompanied minors; continuous engagement and exchanges, by the EU and by Member States, with countries of origin and transit; prioritised funding, and the creation of a common EU asylum system by the end of 2012. The Commission has also proposed higher standards of protection for unaccompanied children.

But there is also cause for optimism: “At home, improvements can already be made this winter, if Member States deliver what they have promised and implement an improved Common European Asylum System,” Cecilia Malmström wrote. “[...] With the help of each EU member state, we can take big steps in the right direction, to ensure that these children receive a dignified welcome at Europe’s borders.” ■



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EU Anti-Trafficking Day

The sixth EU Anti-Trafficking Day was held in Brussels on October 18. The issue remains among the most emotive subjects in border control and migration management and the available figures are “deeply troubling” according to EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström, who spoke at the event.

International Labour Organisation estimates released in June put the number of victims of forced labour, including sexual exploitation, at almost 21 mil-

lion globally and at around 880,000 within the EU. Furthermore, Eurostat data collected for the Commission show that women and girls make up nearly 80 percent of victims in the EU and that three quarters of victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation.

In a June 2012 Eurobarometer poll of EU citizens, 93 percent of respondents said they wanted EU Member States to invest in cooperation against trafficking in human beings (THB). And also in

June, the Commission presented its five-year strategy (2012-2016) to work towards the eradication of THB. The strategy aims to tie the forces of Europe closer together and to put victims at the forefront of the approach. It also tries to be concrete and practical, and – drawing on input from a wide range of stakeholders – identifies five priorities: Strengthening the identification, protection and assistance to victims, with special emphasis on children; stepping up prevention of the crime, including by reducing demand; increasing the prosecution and conviction of traffickers; enhancing the coordination and coherence within the EU, with international organisations, and with third countries, and increasing knowledge of, and effective response to, emerging trends in human trafficking.

The strategy proposes no fewer than 40 measures to be implemented both at European and Member State level.

In addition, the Commission will fund research next year on ways to reduce demand, bearing in mind the need for a gender perspective. That research will look at how men and women are recruited and exploited, their different vulnerabilities to victimisation, and the impact of different forms of trafficking on men and women. The Commission will also launch a study on vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied minors and children with disabilities. The results will feed into the Commission’s report – in 2016 – on the impact of existing national laws criminalising the use of services with knowledge that the person concerned is a victim of trafficking.

As part of the event, Frontex Director of Operations Division Klaus Rösler detailed concrete progress stemming from a multi-agency Joint Statement signed at last year’s event. Speaking on behalf of the seven Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Agencies involved, he said many of the steps already undertaken involve the creation of enhanced training provisions for stakeholders. These include a specialised THB Online Learning Module developed by CEPOL, the European Police College and a THB Training Manual and Toolkit jointly developed by Frontex and CEPOL. Frontex has also created a second edition of its Handbook on Risk Profiles on THB 2012, and launched the VEGA Handbook aimed at enhancing the detection and disruption of criminal organisations involved in THB and migrant smuggling at the borders.

But there has also been concrete operational progress in the field. The number of cross-border THB investigations referred to Europol over the preceding 12 months more than doubled on the previous year, from 749 to 1549. Moreover, a dedicated counter-THB project, Focal Point Phoenix, supported 16 operations investigating 257 new THB cases and led to the arrest of 54 suspects and identification of 154 victims of THB.

The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) project meanwhile aims to combat all forms of human smuggling by targeting organised crime groups with a focus on criminal hubs in the southern, south-eastern and south-western areas of the EU and joins the forces of 18 Member States, the Commission, Eurojust and Frontex. ■

Frontex and EASO Sign Working Arrangement



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Frontex and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) signed a Working Arrangement in late September. The agreement formalises existing cooperation between the two agencies and will provide a framework for developing closer ties and mutual support in the future.

The need for ever closer cooperation between the two agencies has been highlighted in a number of EU policy documents, including the Stockholm Programme and various Council Conclusions and Commission Communications.

In particular, the Stockholm Programme stresses that it is essential that

the activities of Frontex and EASO be coordinated when it comes to the reception of migrants at the EU's external borders and to the identification of those in need of international protection.

According to the Working Arrangement, this coordination will be specifically focussed on: Assessments and operational responses when assisting Member States, particular in view of the deployment of European Border Guard Teams and/or Asylum Support Teams; developing methods to better identify those in need of international protection in the context of mixed migration flows; exchanging in-

formation on the profiles and compositions of expert pools as well as sharing best practices on the functioning of those pools; exploring the possibilities for the setting up of common or mixed teams of border management and asylum experts; exchanging best practices and methodologies on data collection and exchange, as well as on information-gathering and the production and sharing of statistics and analyses; establishing and implementing specific mechanisms for joint Third Country Monitoring, and the development of training materials, training strategies and plans as well as exploring mutual participation in training activities.

The two Agencies have already cooperated on an ad hoc basis across a wide range of activities encompassing Frontex and EASO operations, risk analysis, and training. Frontex regularly participates as an observer on EASO's Management Board and EASO is mandated in the revised Frontex regulation to be a permanent member of the Frontex Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights.

"This arrangement is a milestone for Frontex," said Frontex Executive Director Ilkka Laitinen. "[...] I very much look forward to sharing our expertise and experience to further improve the raising and harmonising of European standards in these crucial areas."

Dr Robert Visser, EASO's Executive Director added that, "Bilateral Cooperation between the two agencies is already ongoing, at different levels, on a regular basis. [...] This agreement should be seen as the beginning of a long-term partnership between the two agencies." ■

BRIEFS

Data Protection Chief Criticises Commission

European Data Protection Supervisor Peter Hustinx issued a report in September objecting to plans announced by the European Commission to grant national law enforcement agencies and Europol access to biometric data obtained from the fingerprints of asylum seekers. According to the www.euobserver.com news portal, the commission wants the data, kept in the EURODAC system, to be used only for the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences and other serious crimes.

Italy Renegotiates Migrant Arrangement with Libya

Speaking at a press conference in Malta on September 12, Italian Foreign Affairs Minister Giulio Terzi said Italy was renegotiating migration arrangements with the Libyan government. Previously, Italian authorities had automatically sent Libyan migrants rescued at sea back to Libya, but this practice was declared illegal by the European Court of Human Rights in February of this year. Earlier, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, urged Italian authorities to prioritise a human rights approach when dealing with irregular migration, and referred specifically to bilateral arrangements with Libya as an area of concern.

FRAN Quarterly for Q2, 2012

The Frontex quarterly risk analysis report for the second quarter of 2012 shows a dramatic overall reduction in detected illegal border crossings into the EU. Based on statistics from members of the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN) for the reporting period, numbers fell by nearly half compared to the same period in 2011, chiefly as a result of the easing of the Arab Spring. Against this backdrop of general decline however, the Greek-Turkish land border – still the undisputed irregular migration hot spot in Q2 – registered a 25 percent increase year on year, due mostly to increased detections of migrants from Bangladesh and particularly from Syria.

At the EU level, a number of clear trends were identified. The most commonly detected

nationality crossing the external border remained Afghan, comprising nearly 20 percent of the total. These migrants were detected mostly at the Greek-Turkish land border and are believed to have been previously in Iran, where legal permission to stay is increasingly being revoked or restricted. Despite this steady trend for the most commonly detected nationality, detections of all other top-six nationalities of illegal border crossers increased compared to a year earlier. These included migrants from Bangladesh (+35 percent), Syria (+639 percent) and Somalia (+62 percent).

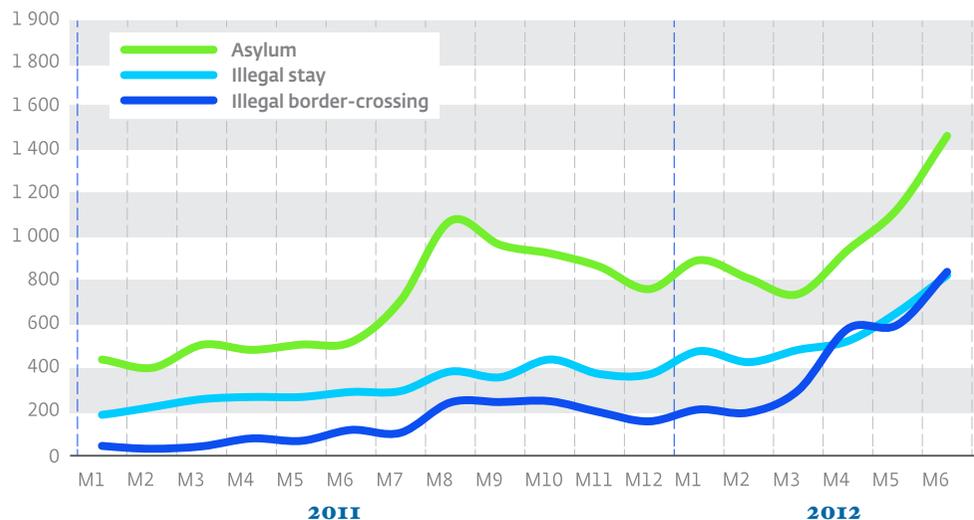
It should be noted that Syrians do not require a visa to enter Turkey, while migrants from Somalia were mostly detected at the Maltese sea border on boats from Libya. Specifically, in May 2012 the arrival of Somali

migrants in Malta increased significantly while Italy registered a decrease in the number of Somali migrants apprehended in Sicily and the Pelagic Islands over the same period.

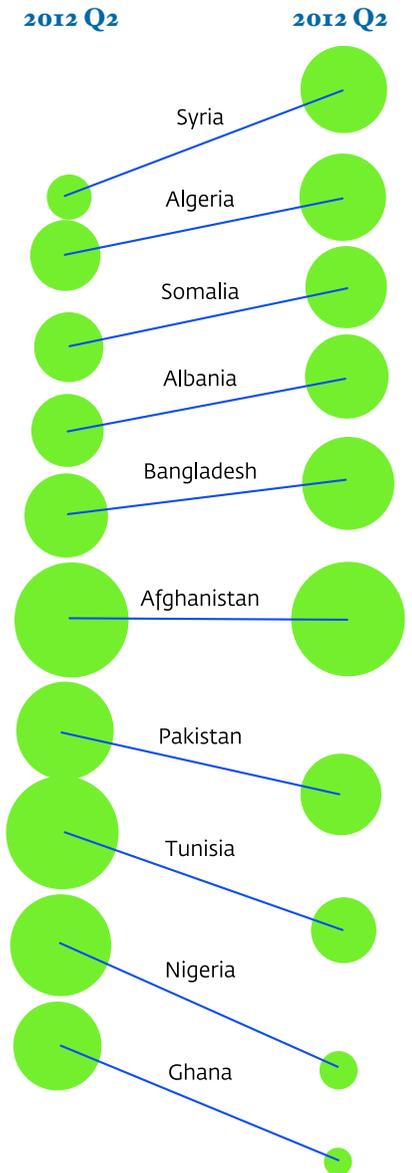
The massive displacement of Syrian citizens was a result of the deteriorating military situation in Syria. Following the failure of UN special envoy Kofi Annan’s six-point plan to restore peace, European nations experienced a marked rise in claims for international protection, with many countries declaring that Syrians would now automatically be granted refugee status. In terms of secondary movements, Syrians were also detected on exit from Greece and on entry to German, Belgian and Dutch airports using counterfeit EU residence permits and forged Greek and Bulgarian travel documents.

Greece continued to be the primary transit route for irregular migration to the EU, whereas elsewhere the external border was affected by those from within the European neighborhood. Movement was seen in the Western Balkans by those of Serbian origin as well as at the eastern borders by Moldovan and Georgian citizens attempting to enter Poland. Refusal of Georgian nationals at the Polish-Belarusian border rose by 162 percent compared to the second quarter of 2011. This is considered likely to lead to an increase of illegal stayers in other EU nations, most likely Germany and Sweden. The eastern border was also the most active region for cross border crime, with drug trafficking and smuggling of cigarettes, petrol and other excise goods as well as the sale of stolen vehicles presenting some of the biggest challenges for effective border management.

The full FRAN Q2 report is available from the Frontex website. ■



Data reported by Member States on Syrians for detection of illegal border crossing, illegal stay and asylum applications have followed similar trends since early 2011, with asylum applications remaining above the levels of detection for illegal border crossing or illegal stay



Detections of illegal border crossing during Q2 2011 and 2012 for the top ten nationalities shown by circle size; gradient of lines indicates percentage change.

Consultative Forum Holds First Meeting in Warsaw



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Frontex headquarters hosted the inaugural meeting of its newly-formed Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights on October 16. Its first order of business was to elect its first two Co-Chairs. Ms Aydan Iyigüngör, of the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and Stefan Kessler of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) will serve for one year as Co-Chairs representing EU Agencies and NGOs respectively.

"Nowhere in Europe can you find a higher or more professional level of expert

knowledge on Fundamental Rights than in our Consultative Forum," said Frontex Executive Director Ilkka Laitinen. "Not only respect for Fundamental Rights, but their active promotion, is a firm cornerstone of the agency's strategy and this forum reinforces that commitment."

The creation of a Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights was enshrined in a 2011 revision to Frontex's founding regulation and it will meet at least twice a year. ■



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Twenty-five representatives of border guard and front-line agencies from the six Eastern Partnership countries took part in a training session on trafficking in human beings (THB), in Chisinau, Moldova, from October 8-10. The course was conducted by experts from the Slovenian Police and Frontex.

The training took place under the auspices of the EU-funded Eastern Partnership's Flagship Initiative Training project (EaP FIT) in Integrated Border Management and grouped together border guards and other first-line officers dealing with migration issues, such as Consular and Visa staff. As well as an information and good-practice sharing platform for investigation and intelligence methods used in the various countries represented, the three-day session also provided participants with first-hand instruction in the identification and interception of human trafficking situ-

ations. Course materials included Frontex's EU Risk Profiles Handbook 2012 as well as the VEGA handbook, developed in conjunction with the European Police College (CEPOL), which highlights countermeasures for disrupting criminal activities related to THB at air borders. Input and discussion included the main counter-trafficking strategies, the role and responsibilities of frontline agencies and traffickers' common modus operandi. The importance of international and multi-agency cooperation in the fight against THB was also emphasised.

The Slovenian Police also presented their Operation Red Fish as an example of a successful counter-THB operation from initiation to completion and the successful arrest of offenders. The event was the second such training session aimed at countering THB in third countries, the first having taken place in China earlier this year.



The first group of asylum seekers to be transferred from Christmas Island to Nauru, as part of the new regional processing arrangements.

Australia Strengthens Asylum Position

The Australian government has begun taking measures to further implement a controversial asylum policy launched in September. The strategy, which aims to deter migrants arriving illegally by boat, has been widely criticised by human rights groups as well as junior parties in Parliament. As early as the end of September migrants who had arrived by boat were being processed on the neighbouring island nation of Nauru. And on October 10, the Senate passed a bill formally designating Manus Island in Papua New Guinea as a second processing camp. Leaders from both nations claim the centre could be up and running in a

matter of weeks and will be able to accommodate close to 600 people.

Australia had previously run a camp on Manus, but closed it eight years ago after the offshore asylum project was cancelled. Soldiers have been working since September to make it operational again. Meanwhile, Immigration Minister Chris Bowen claims the government's approach is working. While boats continue to arrive, the Minister points out, migrants have started volunteering to be returned to their countries of origin.

A group of 18 Sri Lankans who arrived on Christmas Island were placed on a charter flight home after requesting not

to be transferred to Nauru for processing. The group also subsequently decided not to pursue any claim for asylum. Hardliners in the opposition acknowledge this as a victory, but still claim that the government is not going far enough and should reinstate all the previous policies of former Prime Minister John Howard. Opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison supported his party's stance stating that:

"Nauru is having at least some impact on these decisions and I just wonder how much more impact these measures could have if the government went the full distance and restored temporary protection visas and turning boats back where it was safe to do so."

But not all observations have been positive and the scheme continues to draw criticism on human rights grounds. A previous offshoring plan in Malaysia was shelved last year following a High Court ruling against it on rights concerns. The real issue at stake, however, according to Agnes Wolley, a columnist at OpenDemocracy.net, is the abdication of ethical responsibility. She claims offshore processing keeps asylum seekers in a perpetual state of transience and semi-legality, removing ethics and responsibility "from the realm of everyday lived experience," a problem she believes is replicating itself globally. For now at least the government seems intent on pushing forward with the strategy while the rest of the world waits to see what its longer-term effects will be. ■