



Managing migration abroad

Why, where, what and how?

by Roderick Parkes

The EU has a large political apparatus for managing international crises and another for managing migration and borders. With a migration crisis sweeping Africa and flowing into Europe, it needs to link them up. The EU is beginning discussions about melding the available tools, its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and its border agency (Frontex), to create an integrated ‘international migration crisis management system’. But this task raises tricky questions about who should do what and where – questions which cut to the very heart of the EU’s ongoing strategic review.

Why?

The EU’s new Global Strategy (EUGS) prominently features the phrase: ‘internal and external security are ever more intertwined’. This is the recognition that security problems inside the EU have roots outside, and that external security problems outside increasingly have roots inside the Union. The drafters presumably had one particular problem in mind: irregular migration. The EU is being hit by flows of people fleeing external security problems across Africa and Asia; and, increasingly, the resulting political difficulties inside the EU risk destabilising nearby countries like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. To alleviate this pressure, and implement the EUGS, Europe’s

policymakers must create an international system for migration crisis management.

This task of alleviating an acute migration crisis is new, but the idea of an internal-external nexus is not. The EU has long tried to deal with migration, terrorism and crime beyond its borders. When Frontex was set up in 2004, it gained the power to boost law enforcement in the EU’s neighbours. Around the same time, an EU strategy on external security pointed out that failed states like Afghanistan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) could provide a haven for criminals and terrorists, thus giving an added rationale to create CSDP missions there. Thus, today, the task facing EU policymakers is not to begin internationalising the EU’s home affairs apparatus, or to acquaint CSDP staff with home affairs priorities, but rather to reform a decade-old system for handling cross-border security problems.

For a decade, the EU has pictured itself at the centre of a series of ‘concentric circles’ radiating outwards: the EU aimed to improve governance in countries surrounding it – the enlargement candidates like Serbia or Turkey to its southeast, and then an outer arc of neighbours stretching from Morocco in the southwest to Ukraine in the northeast. Frontex played a key role in this, spreading border



standards and acting closely with the Commission Directorate-Generals (DGs) for enlargement and neighbourhood. In the countries beyond these concentric circles, EU foreign policy became more diffuse, although no less demanding. It comprised a scattering of security missions in trouble spots such as the Horn of Africa or Sahel, where the EU felt adversely affected by instability and conflict.

In the heat of last year's migration crisis, EU leaders found that this pattern of foreign policy, with its heavy emphasis on a nearby ring of countries, was of limited help. Nearby states like Turkey, Serbia or Libya sit at the very end of the migration route into the EU. At best, the EU was able to use its influence to turn them into massive 'holding-pens' for migrants coming from distant countries like Afghanistan, Iraq or Nigeria. The EU drew the obvious lesson: in far-off migration-source countries across Asia and Africa, the Union clearly needed to deepen its activities; and across its near abroad, it needed to intensify its focus on the weak spots where migrants were crossing borders unhindered. EU leaders were effectively turning the mental map of foreign policy inside out.

At their latest summit in October 2016, EU leaders discussed how to better align their migration and foreign policy, setting out new priorities. The guiding image today is said to be of a 'plasma ball': the EU has shifted the spotlight onto far-away crisis areas (such as Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal) and is tracing the migration routes from these places into the EU (through Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, Libya and Egypt). This mental image of a plasma ball, with its peripheral hotspots and disorderly flows into the EU, replaces the idea of orderly concentric circles radiating outwards from Europe. The shift clearly has an impact on the work of Frontex and CSDP, raising the question which of them should perform which migration-management task where, and how.

Where?

The first question for the planners creating this new system is where – literally where – Frontex and CSDP come in. Frontex has traditionally concentrated its international activities on the countries ringing the EU, whilst CSDP missions are mostly active in sending regions across Africa and Asia. It

makes sense to retain this basic geographical division. The EU would, after all, struggle to set up a new CSDP mission in nearby areas like the Western Balkans or Turkey, where it might face hostility from Russia or host societies; the technocrats at Frontex can operate in these zones more discreetly. By the same token, the Frontex technocrats would struggle in dangerous trouble zones across Africa or Asia; tasks there can be left to trained crisis-managers from the CSDP side.

CSDP and Frontex operatives would, nevertheless, have to alter their current geographical focus somewhat. CSDP planners would have to expand their activities in and around migrant-sending spots like Mali or Niger. This would involve linking up their existing scattering of missions in Africa and Asia in a bid to cope with cross-border people flows and to tackle the facilitators of disorderly migration such as smuggling networks. Meanwhile, Frontex, rather than concentrating on the EU's neighbourhood as a whole, would have to select focal points for its activities there. The agency would be expected to export its so-called hotspot system to migration routes through the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or Serbia, thus replicating the migrant-processing hubs it created in Greece and Italy last year.

The EU is already making reforms to this end.

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CSDP planners are trying to regionalise their missions in the Sahel, and to combat people-smuggling in sub-Saharan Africa. CSDP and Frontex staff are also broaching the question whether the EU could perform truly tricky tasks like protecting

refugee camps or evacuating vulnerable people. And yet, even as these reforms occur, the basic geographic principle is apparently up for question. It seems that there is no real agreement within the EU that CSDP should focus mainly on distant migration source countries, or that Frontex should manage routes closer to home. At present, CSDP missions actually appear to be gravitating further towards the EU whilst Frontex is moving activities ever further away from the EU into Africa and Asia.

CSDP planners are asking whether an EU member could demand CSDP-style support on its territory by triggering Article 222, the EU's 'solidarity clause', in response to a migration crisis. And they ask whether it might be feasible to use EUROGENDFOR, the CSDP gendarmerie format,



inside the EU. Meanwhile, thanks to its new mandate, Frontex is now permitted to create operations in any country which shares a border with the EU. Governments ask if that might cover African or Asian states which share an *air* border with the EU? If these trends continue, CSDP-style missions might one day be deployed on the territory of the EU itself, whilst Frontex will end up establishing border operations further afield, in places like Niger where it will shortly send a liaison officer.

Today, like ships in the night, CSDP and Frontex activities are crossing somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean. After a CSDP borders mission was pushed back out of Libya in 2014, the EU created a CSDP anti-smuggling mission in international waters off the coast of North Africa, not too far from where Frontex is operating as it expands its activities out from EU waters. There is a risk that these twin missions risk achieving nothing so much as to provide a 'taxi service' for migrants from Libya: if CSDP missions stop trying to stem upheavals at source in Africa, and if Frontex stops addressing administrative weaknesses inside the EU, the Union will cease to address the external and internal root causes of the crisis. As a result, it would be left administering permanent irregular migration on the route in between, offering passage to stricken migrants.

What?

Of course, it is inevitable that any division of labour between CSDP and Frontex will be rather blurred so as to properly harvest the potential synergies all along the route to Europe. For instance: Frontex could usefully post a liaison officer to a distant CSDP mission in Africa, so as to take over capacity-building tasks once the initial crisis situation has been quelled. Frontex might also be instrumental in pre-conflict situations across Africa, helping CSDP missions to train and equip border authorities so as to allay the risk of crisis. By the same token, CSDP personnel and equipment might well support Frontex in managing migration crises at the EU border, working under the agency's aegis to implement the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism in places like Serbia or the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Yet these potential synergies also signal the likelihood of tensions and competition between Frontex

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and CSDP. To prevent these tensions and achieve a properly integrated relationship between CSDP and Frontex will require a proper appreciation on the part of planners about what each of the two players can bring to the table. This is no easy matter. EU leaders, when setting up overseas missions, still tend to discuss the goals of a mission simultaneously with the question of resource generation, rather than dealing with the two questions sequentially. They thus run the risk of tailoring a mission's mandate to the available resources, rather than defining its goals first and then finding the resources to match. Inevitably, the better-resourced player will come to dominate activities.

CSDP planners fret about this. They worry that agencies like Frontex are the more attractive option, and may simply end up replacing CSDP civilian missions. They fear that EU leaders will be tempted to turn to the well-endowed Frontex as crises across Africa and Asia become more protracted, rather than changing the way that CSDP missions work. And they can see that Frontex comes without the political baggage which often weighs down a CSDP mission: Frontex does what it says on the tin, focusing on the narrow task of building borders, rather than – say – using capacity-building programmes to promote the next wave of reformist leaders across Africa. Frontex will also not be substantially affected by the prospect of Brexit as the UK is not part of Schengen or EU borders policy.

This kind of political expedience may already be at play in the tendency, identified above, to push Frontex ever deeper abroad, and to draw CSDP missions inwards onto member state territory. CSDP remains a rather intergovernmental format, and that means that EU governments facing acute border pressure naturally expect CSDP missions to be used to help them with migrant-processing and reception tasks, even if military personnel are not always the most suitable players. By contrast Frontex's work is increasingly managed by the European Commission rather than the member state officials who sit on its management board; and this fact alone could pull it away from the EU somewhat and see it link up with the Commission's extensive development machinery in Africa and Asia.

If this occurs, Frontex will simply end up doing long-term capacity building in a handful of

receptive African states and CSDP missions will end up performing blunt crisis-management close to home. Frontex officials already worry about this, fretting that CSDP missions close to home will ‘de-professionalise’ Europe’s border management and reverse the long process of civilianising frontier controls. They believe military personnel have little place monitoring the flow of goods and persons into the EU, let alone collecting evidence to bring criminal proceedings against smugglers. CSDP planners worry, meanwhile, that Frontex overseas missions will fish from the same small pool of international civilian staff. Frontex’s model of funding and accountability may mean it can draw more easily on this resource.

How?

To achieve good relations between Frontex and CSDP missions will require, as an absolute minimum, information exchange and shared situational awareness. Work in this field is already relatively advanced. Since 2008, Frontex has exchanged information with the European External Action Service. Frontex provides the CSDP naval operation off Libya with pre-frontier situational awareness thanks to its Eurosur satellite system. It has a liaison officer on board vessels there, helping with the identification of migrants and smugglers. Moreover, Frontex is already working alongside the CSDP naval mission to train the Libyan coast guard. And it is providing the Libyan coastguard with products from its suite of Eurosur tools (its ‘Meteo’ service, on weather conditions). And yet, much still needs to be done.

Frontex officials who provide the CSDP naval mission with satellite imaging have no idea if the CSDP vessels actually need this information, let alone act upon it. What they do perceive is that the CSDP naval mission is building up its own secure communications network, replicating Frontex’s work. Such minor frictions come on top of all the usual problems of trying to integrate civilian and military databases, not to mention pooling information held separately by intelligence, police and customs authorities. Here, Frontex has its own distinct model for bringing together police, intelligence and border authorities (the Eurosur Fusion Centres), whilst CSDP missions are creating their own integrated structures, not least as they try to link civilian and military CSDP missions in the Sahel.

Trickier still: Frontex and CSDP officials will not necessarily act harmoniously even if they do have the same information, because they follow rather different philosophies. Take the question of relations to civil society. NGOs are currently operating

in the central Mediterranean alongside the CSDP naval mission, sometimes even entering Libyan territorial waters to ferry migrants to Europe. There is no suggestion that the CSDP mission is encouraging this – its commanders are frustrated by these activities. But it does point to a broader philosophical clash: CSDP missions generally try to take a conciliatory approach to civil society, a hard-won lesson from military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. From a home affairs perspective, NGOs who smuggle migrants into Europe are potentially liable to criminal penalty.

There are broader strategic differences as well. CSDP applies a joined-up or ‘integrated’ approach to its crisis-management work. Frontex, too, has an ‘integrated’ approach to border control. Both players are thus united in a desire to harness and combine a full range of resources when implementing their priorities. But the trouble is that their priorities differ and, as such, they are both competing for the same personnel, equipment and relations to third countries. Under its new mandate, Frontex is charged with drafting a strategy to promote its integrated approach to border management. Meanwhile, CSDP planners will likely have to set out implementation plans for their integrated approach to crisis management under the EUGS. Clearly it is important that both sides be involved in the other’s deliberations.

To see how necessary joined-up thinking is, it is worth looking at a pressing case-study: the potential collapse of the EU-Turkey migration deal. Since concluding this deal with Brussels in spring, Ankara has been holding back the flow of Syrians and Afghans into the EU. In return, it has been promised a fast-track to visa-liberalisation. But if it does not gain this in December, the fear in the EU is that Turkey could well open its borders again and send migrants flooding into Europe. Clearly there is a need for contingency planning by Frontex and CSDP. Yet the EU cannot undertake this contingency-planning openly, for fear of spooking Turkey. Moreover, the Commission and the EU member states are each handling different strands of the negotiations with Turkey, and this could well add to gaps between CSDP and Frontex.

While crisis management and border management become increasingly intertwined (and encroach on foreign policy), integrating different approaches and distinct practises may come to represent the key challenge for EU policymakers.

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