

# Frontex and the military and security industry

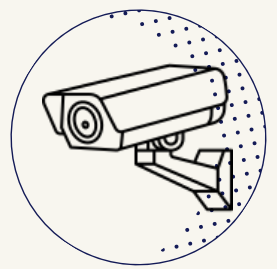
## Abolish Frontex Research Group - November 2021

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has increasingly close relations with the European military and security industry. Since it started operating in 2005 it has primarily functioned as an intermediary between industry and border authorities of EU member states. With its expanded budget for the next seven years (2021-2027) it is bound to become a big buyer of its own.

### Equipment

Frontex always had to rely on EU member states to make personnel and equipment – mainly (patrol) vessels, helicopters and surveillance aircraft – available for its operations. Often this resulted in problems for the agency, because countries didn't make enough equipment available or didn't live up to their promises to do so.

Since 2011 Frontex got more possibilities to buy its own equipment, but it lacked the money to do this on a significant scale. With the expansion of Frontex since 2015 the wish to give Frontex its own material became more prominent. Since 2021 it also gets the funding to make this possible.

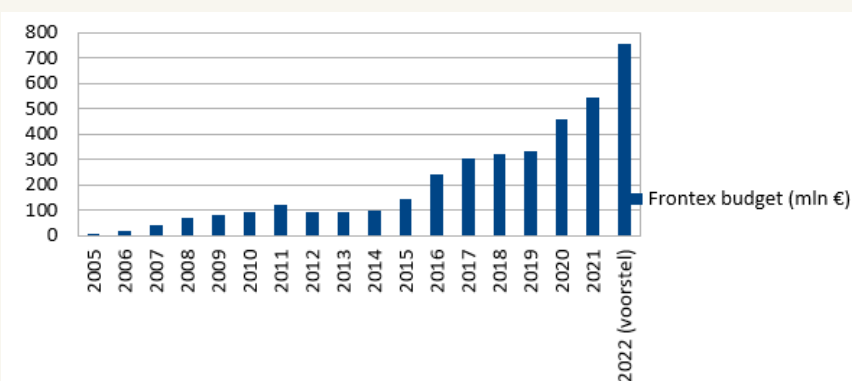


The same year saw the start of the deployment of the Frontex Standing Border Guard Corps, which should be a 10,000 person strong armed border police force by 2027.

Apart from its increasing role in border security and control the EU has expanded the overall powers of Frontex, for example in giving binding advices to member states and in cooperation with non-EU-countries. The European Commission has dubbed Frontex the EU's 'Return Agency', signalling its growing role in stimulating and facilitating joint deportations from EU countries. This will also lead to more contracts with private companies.

### Budget and own equipment

The budget of Frontex has expanded rapidly since its inception in 2005. Under the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-27, the seven-year EU budget, Frontex gets €5.6 billion. An unknown part of this is earmarked for buying or leasing border security and control equipment. [1]



In 2017 the Frontex Management Board, comprised of representatives of member states' border authorities, adopted a strategy for buying own equipment to gradually build up its own capacities for border security operations, rapid interventions and deportations. The document suggested a divided approach, with Frontex purchasing light or medium weight equipment – such as patrol cars, heartbeat detectors, mobile surveillance systems and night vision equipment – and leasing heavy equipment,

such as patrol vessels and helicopters. Leasing means that the operating and maintenance of the equipment would be performed by the provider, under control of Frontex.

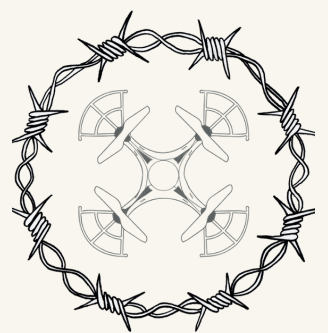
EU Member States are also getting EU funding for strengthening border security. The €8 billion Integrated Border Management Fund (2021-2027) can be used for a broad range of activities, including purchases of infrastructure and operational equipment for border security, training, information exchange with Frontex and with other member states, studies, development of new technologies, identification and fingerprinting equipment, IT systems and communication campaigns. A condition for funding can be that the member state concerned makes the equipment available for Frontex operations for parts of the year.

Under its predecessor, the Internal Security Fund – Borders, for example several countries got funding for purchasing border patrol vessels. Italian shipbuilder Cantiere was a big winner, providing patrol vessels to Greece (€41.7 million), Italy (€32.4 million) and Malta (€48.6 million). The Romanian Border Police ordered two patrol vessels from Dutch shipbuilder Damen (€26 billion).

### Border industrial complex

The increasing budgets for border security and control benefit military and security companies. They provide the equipment and services for the militarisation of the borders, for border checks, for intelligence and for deportations.

The main players are the large European arms companies Airbus (Transeuropean), Leonardo (Italy) and Thales (France). They each have a broad portfolio in the fields of border security and control. Next to this more specialized, smaller companies focus on parts of these areas, such as surveillance systems or biometrics applications.



Airbus for example provides helicopters, drones and communication systems for border security. It provides drone surveillance and cybersecurity services to Frontex. Leonardo also flew surveillance drones during a trial for Frontex. The company produces border patrol helicopters and is involved in biometrics and satellite-observation projects for EU border security. Thales provides for example radar and command and control systems for patrol vessels and border surveillance systems. Through its acquisition of Gemalto, an (biometrics) identification company, Thales has also become a big player in the field of border control.

It is important to note that these companies are also major suppliers of weapons around the world. They readily export to countries at war or with internal conflicts, authoritarian regimes and human rights abusers. In this way, they benefit twice from the misery of refugees: first by exporting the weapons that contribute to the reasons why they have to flee, then by providing the equipment to prevent them from finding a safe and livable future. Over the last few years the EU has increasingly supported the 'global competitiveness' and exports of the European military and security industry, making this a part of its own process of militarisation through the European Defense Fund and other instruments.

[1]The original budget proposal from the European Commission granted €8 billion to Frontex, with €2.2 billion earmarked for buying or leasing equipment.

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### Lobby

The influence of the military and security industry on EU border and migration policies has been well documented. It has succeeded in pushing a narrative in which migration is primarily seen as a security problem, with migrants as threats, which underlines European border and migration policies. Representatives of the companies and their lobby organisations have positioned themselves as experts on the issue, and as such they are warmly embraced by EU and member states institutions. Once something is seen as a security problem, a military approach, and thus the use of military and security equipment, to deal with it seems to be a logical next step.



The large arms companies and lobby organisations regularly have meetings with the European Commission and with Frontex, have produced influential advisory papers, and meet throughout the year with politicians and (military and civilian) officials at roundtables, conferences and arms and security fairs.

The expansion of Frontex – with its own standing corps, its own budget to purchase/lease equipment, the possibility of operations in non-EU-countries and far-reaching powers to force EU member states to strengthen border security – in the last few years is also something that has been propagated by the industry for years before 2015.

### Meetings



Before 2015 companies would often visit the Frontex headquarters in Warsaw to show their products and technologies and try to influence purchasing and policy decisions. At that time Frontex didn't have money to buy its own large equipment and was mainly acting as an intermediary between industry and EU member states' border authorities.

Since then, Frontex has streamlined and somewhat limited industry access. Instead of individual company visits, it now regularly organises Industry Days (annual), workshops, conferences, industry dialogues and other events where it gathers several companies to present their technologies and equipment. These events often revolve around one aspect of the whole field of border security and control, such as biometrics, maritime surveillance or handguns for the 10,000 person Standing

Border Guard Corps the agency is building. Companies have to apply to be present at such events, after which Frontex makes a selection of the proposals.

Research by NGOs FragDenStaat and Corporate Europe Observatory showed that, between 2017 and 2019, Frontex “met with 108 companies to discuss topics such as guns and ammunition, biometrics, maritime and aerial surveillance, heartbeat detectors, and document inspection systems.” Again, Airbus, Leonardo and Thales (including the digital security and biometrics company Gemalto it acquired in 2019) are the most regular visitors.

### Contracts

With its new budget to buy or lease its own equipment it can be expected that Frontex will award more large contracts in the coming years. The agency often concludes 'framework contracts' for services it wants to use over longer periods, where a stipulated maximum amount of money can be used for specific purchases from the contracted companies whenever Frontex needs them.

The most important Frontex contracts for border security and control work up until now include:

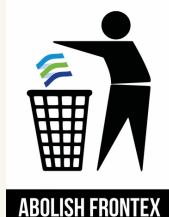


- Series of contracts for providing aerial surveillance services, worth tens of millions of euros in total. The contracts were granted between 2015 and 2021 to EASP Air (Netherlands), CAE Aviation (Luxembourg), DEA (UK) and other companies.
- A €50 million framework contract of October 2020 with Airbus and Israeli arms companies Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and Elbit to provide drone surveillance flights in the Mediterranean.
- Two contracts worth €5 million to provide firearms and ammunition for Frontex's Standing Border Guard Corps. Glock (Austria) will provide 9mm pistols, Mildat and Parasnake Arkadiusz Szewczyk (both Poland) will provide ammunition.
- Spanish company GMV has secured several contracts, with a total value of over €25 million, for the development, enlargement and maintenance of Eurosur, the EU-wide border surveillance system
- Several contracts for the development and testing of two of the biometrics systems developed by the EU to control and monitor the movement of people, the Entry/Exit Scheme (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Vision Box (Portugal) and Everis (Spain) got contracts for EES pilot projects at the borders of Bulgaria and Spain.
- Frontex has spend over €30 million on contracts with AS Aircontact (Norway), Air Charter Service (UK) and others for providing aircraft for deportation flights.

Frontex also grants lots of small contracts for logistical and support services and goods, ranging from business gifts to security services and from consultancy to the provision of software and language courses.

**More info on border militarisation, Frontex and the role of the military and security industry, see the 'Border Wars' report and briefing series by the Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel, Centre Delàs and others.**

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