

Rights groups slam “decades of abuse” and “open door for lobbyists” as Frontex marks 20 year anniversary

As Frontex, the EU Border and Coast Guard Agency, marks its 20th anniversary on 26th October, MEPs, rights groups, and survivors of abuses at borders say the agency has worsened already lethal conditions at EU borders, while providing a “backdoor into the heart of power” for lobbyists and profiteers.

Actions have taken place across Europe to highlight the death toll at Europe’s borders and Frontex’s complicity in it, while an open letter calling for the agency’s abolition has been signed by 79 organisations.

The letter highlights how the scandal-hit agency’s complicity in abuse has continued since the forced resignation of former executive director Fabrice Leggeri (now a French far-right MP), over Frontex involvement in deadly Aegean Sea pushbacks. This includes:

- Deployments in [Bulgaria](#) and [Greece](#), Frontex missions work with border guards who beat and abuse people seeking safety and chase them through the forests with dogs. In Greece, the agency collaborates with the Hellenic Coast Guard (HCG), which in over 2,000 documented incidents has illegally deported [more than 55,000](#) people to Türkiye between 2020 and 2023.
- Operations in the [central Mediterranean](#) where Frontex guides violent Libyan militias towards people on boats in distress. Between 2016 and 2023, over 150,000 people have been abducted at sea and potentially imprisoned in Libyan detention camps, where UN experts have documented arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence.
- [In North Africa](#), Frontex works with regimes that detain people in torture camps or leave them for dead in the desert.

Transparency campaigners from Stop Wapenhandel and the Transnational Institute have also pointed out the unprecedented access Frontex has provided to [lobbyists](#) from the arms, border, and surveillance industries.

The agency has held hundreds of closed-door meetings with executives, as its budget has skyrocketed (by 14,000% since its 2004 funding) with its executive powers expanding in parallel. These relationships are “opaque, clandestine, and wide open to misuse”, according to Mark Akkerman, arms industry expert from the Dutch organisation Stop Wapenhandel.

The organisations argue that the agency has failed in its self-declared mission to manage borders in line with fundamental human rights, and have warned against the EU continuing to grant new funding and power to the agency.

Quotes:

In April 2020, I was kidnapped on Samos, dragged back to sea, and placed on a rubber boat, where I was pushed and pulled for 17 hours before being abandoned at sea. Everything the Greeks did to me was funded and supported by Frontex. Frontex surveillance aircraft flew over the crime scene at least twice that night. A pushback operation is not just

torture and trauma; it's a profound humiliation—being treated as if you are not a human being. When Frontex stands behind the suffering of me and my friends, it feels as if all of Europe wanted us to suffer. And that is the most humiliating thing of all.

- **[Alaa Hamoudi](#), plaintiff in a pending case against Frontex at the Court of Justice of the EU**

“Over the last 20 years, Frontex has been complicit in human rights abuses against people trying to reach safety and a better future in the EU. Sometimes it has acted as the member states' henchman; other times, it has even been the mastermind. Nevertheless, this agency has continued to grow and expand, becoming the ultimate symbol of EU policies against migration and the right to asylum.

Frontex cannot be reformed, it needs to be abolished.

We need to refocus migration policies by moving away from the far-right narrative of threats and crisis, as well as from the capitalist exploitation of a racialized labour-force. The focus must shift to the affected individuals and communities, so we can build a better future together.”

- **MEP Ilaria Salis from the Left group in the European Parliament said,**

The EU's aim of preventing people in need of protection from seeking asylum is impossible to achieve without violating human rights and international law. This is the contradiction at the heart of Frontex that no reform or new face at the top can solve. And it is the reason why we are demanding the abolition of the agency and a complete overhaul of the EU's migration policy, so that it focuses on protecting people's lives and their right to move instead of trying everything to deter them.

- **The [Abolish Frontex](#) network**

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- [Photos of actions](#) by the Abolish Frontex network can be used if the network is credited
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- Fig. 1 below shows Frontex's surging budget against the number of people missing and dead in the Mediterranean; an emergency which Frontex's expansion was presented as a solution to. Fig. 2 shows Frontex's regular meetings with industry; during a period where it regularly failed to engage with rights groups.

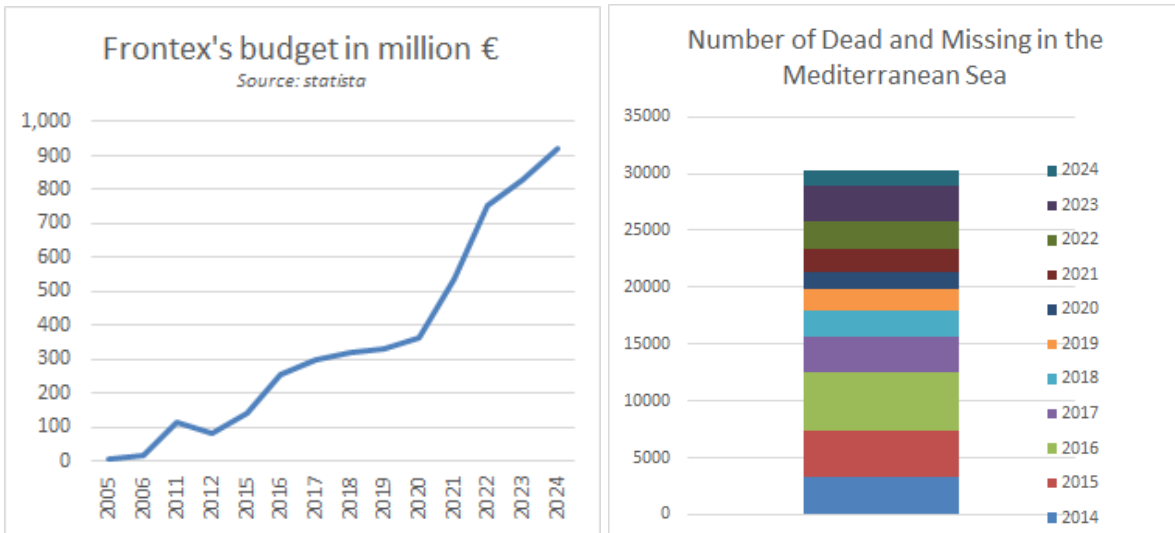


Fig 2.

Frontex meetings with industry - top 10 companies (2020-2023)			
Name	Meetings	Name	Meetings
Idemia	7	Vision-Box	5
Thales	7	Cognitec	4
Airbus	5	IN Groupe	4
Leonardo	5	Microsoft	4
Secunet	5	T3K Forensics	4