



DIMENSION PARLEMENTAIRE



Concept Note

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Session 2

‘What measures can we take to control our external borders?’



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Establishing an ambitious common migration policy necessarily entails control over the European Union’s external borders. Shortcomings in border control lead to chain reactions: a decline in legal immigrant intake and integration capacities, a damage risk to the integrity of the European area of free movement, and greater exposure of European citizens to cross-border crime.

Member States’ inadequate control of the EU’s external borders is **a long-standing and well-documented fact.**

The 2015 crisis revealed the extent of this vulnerability. That year saw the worsening of the conflict in Syria, and Frontex numbered over 1.8 million illegal crossings of the EU’s borders. The intake systems of the main first host countries were quickly overwhelmed, and it must be acknowledged that the European Union did not live up to the challenge. The inadequacy of the Dublin III Regulation in the face of high-tension migratory situations, Frontex’s limited mandate, and deep political differences all played a role in the EU’s inability to provide a coordinated response to the sudden influx of migrants. **These structural weaknesses fuelled lasting mistrust between Member States,** as shown by the temporary reinstatement of internal border controls.

While the situation was stabilised through a transit agreement with Turkey, the structural inadequacies in our external border control have not been overcome, and migratory pressure remains high.

In 2020 for example, Frontex counted 125,226 illegal EU border crossings, down slightly from 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and 370,174 people present in Europe illegally. Furthermore, the return policy is not very effective since a mere 30% of return orders issued by Member States are executed on average.

The first steps have been taken towards better control of our external borders. This includes the decision to transform Frontex from a support and coordination agency into a true field player. The addition of a permanent contingent of 10,000 European border agents by 2027 and a doubling of the agency's budget to €900 million are strong signals in this regard.

Furthermore, the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” presented by the European Commission in September 2020 proposes a significant boost to external border control mechanisms: the introduction of a ‘screening’ mechanism of third-country nationals that do not fulfil entry criteria, the implementation of an asylum procedure at the border, and the overhaul of the Eurodac database.

Special attention is also being paid to the effectiveness of return policies, for example the proposal to appoint a European return coordinator. Finally, the proposal insists on **the need for greater cooperation on migration with countries of origin and transit through ‘comprehensive, balanced and tailor-made’ partnerships.**

The challenge now lies in building a consensus between European partners on the various aspects of the pact to fulfil the shared ambition of greater control over our external borders.

In this context, several questions will be debated during this session: what measures should we take to finally exercise better control over our external borders? How can we balance the need to protect our borders and protect the fundamental rights of immigrants in general, and asylum seekers in particular? How can we lay down the conditions for partnerships of trust with countries of origin and transit? How can we foster sustainable economic development for the countries of origin of migrants who think they can find better living conditions in the European Union?