

**Frontex : effective control of Europe's external borders contributes to the fight against organised crime within the Schengen area**

**On the occasion of her visit to France, the Deputy Director of the European agency Frontex, Ms. Aija Kalnaja, gave an interview to GENDinfo, during which she discussed the strengthening of the Frontex mission and the need to prepare officers who will be deployed over the long term for the different situations they will be called upon to manage. She also discussed the agency's upcoming strategic developments.**

**You came from Warsaw to attend the military ceremony organised by the General Directorate of the National Gendarmerie on 25 November 2024, during which several Category 2 gendarmes from the Frontex border guard corps were honoured. Why did you want to be there ?**

This ceremony is indeed very symbolic of the commitment of France and the French gendarmerie to Europe. In view of the political upheavals around the world, including within the European Union (EU), this commitment is more important than ever. The French gendarmerie is expending a lot of energy to find volunteers and then to train them for their future missions. As Deputy Director of Frontex, this is a dynamic that I would like to see generalised in each Member State. This is why it is important for me to be there.

**This ceremony also marked the opening of the 3.0 Pre-deployment and Refresher Course organised by the Gendarmerie Command for External Missions (CGMEx) for gendarmes already deployed and those who will be deployed from January 2025. What are Frontex's expectations regarding this training ?**

I think it is very good that France is organising this training, because this is not the case everywhere. There are information sessions, but this is training with a solid programme, which in particular allows new arrivals to gain a good understanding of what deployment in Frontex operations involves, because these are unique. We operate under the command of the host Member State or a third country. At the same time, we are training our own chain of command, and the way in which all this is synchronised is very important. In concrete terms, during their deployments, Frontex personnel must follow the national rules of the host country. It is therefore extremely important to know the rules applicable to the Standing Corps in advance. It is also about creating a sense of community and passing on the knowledge and experience of personnel who have already carried out Frontex missions, who can then explain in concrete terms how it works, how to find accommodation, and all the logistics linked to these deployments.

**What measures has Frontex put in place to complement the actions of the Member States in terms of training for Category 2 personnel ?**

We have developed an online pre-deployment course, which is mandatory for all members of the Standing Corps on long-term secondment in Category 2 or on short-term secondment.

However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which this module complements the actions of the Member States, because I think the programmes are different. However, all of these measures should ensure that new arrivals have the necessary knowledge to function in Frontex's operational theatres. Then, when they arrive in their deployment area, they follow an operational briefing specific to the operational theatre, during which they are presented with the specific features of the host Member State that they will have to consider, in particular the use of weapons and the use of force, the rules for which are different across the EU.

**During this week of training, the trainees have a day of role-playing with the theme of "the fight against illegal immigration and cross-border organised crime." This day is organised in partnership with the Lübeck Police Academy and the German NFPOC, which provide their support and expertise through the presence of two trainers. This European partnership for the training of Frontex officers is a first in France. Is this type of cooperation common on a European scale and does Frontex encourage it ?**

I absolutely support these cooperation actions. Is it widespread? Not really, especially with regard to the preparation of Categories 2 and 3. This type of partnership is highly valuable, and it would be interesting to see if Frontex could support the efforts of the Member States in this area. The role-playing of officers is essential to prepare them in advance for the different situations they will face in their deployment area. When they are deployed in Finland, the officers are mainly responsible for combating the instrumentalisation of migration. In Lampedusa, they will be more exposed to daily human misery. They will have to save lives and cope with a large influx of people. The challenges and scenarios are therefore multiple. Furthermore, we cannot forget that cross-border crime is a major problem. The Standing Corps that we form with the Member States is the last line of defence. If we fail to stop crime at our external borders, it will spread within the European Union. This is why it is extremely important to increase the capacity of the Standing Corps to combat crime. It is therefore not just a matter of carrying out the usual border management tasks, such as passport checks or border surveillance. Crime is present and it is becoming increasingly violent, in the everyday life of the average European citizen.

**The recruited officers from French Gendarmerie for 2025 completed a HEAT (Hostile Environment Awareness Training) course two weeks ago at the Centre for Safety and Development in Amersfoort, the Netherlands, to prepare them for working in complex environments and situations. Does Frontex have any arrangements in place to train category 2 officers in crisis management and complex situations ?**

Yes, of course. In addition to the HEAT (Hostile Environment Awareness Training) course, we offer training on crowd control and the use of force. The latter is mandatory every year for all our officers. Our training centres do not have a fixed location. We are prepared to set them up as close as possible to our operational theatres to avoid regular travel. We are looking to make this training more accessible. We are also looking for ways to help Category 2 officers, who have been deployed for years, to maintain their skills in shooting, use of force, etc. At the moment, we simply do not have the capacity to do it, but we are working on it. However,

there is a slight clarification that needs to be made when we talk about crisis management, because it covers several aspects. Crisis management can concern natural crises, migration crises or crises related to war crimes. All of these require a completely different training framework. When it comes to the migration crisis, it is more about how to manage the large number of people who arrive. If the crisis becomes more violent, you need a much more robust response, crowd control and the ability to deal with violence in a measured and proportionate way. This is essential. Our job is to de-escalate the situation and make sure that everyone is safe. However, while self-defence is within our remit, offensive action is definitely not and rightly so. This requires very specific training. This is why I believe that the national gendarmerie, thanks to its police capabilities and its expertise in crowd management, is an essential partner in border management.

**In June 2024 the French Gendarmerie organised the first information webinar for the Category 2 Border Guard Mission, in collaboration with CEPOL, FRONTEX, and with the support of the German NFPOC. This webinar was a great success, allowing the Gendarmerie to achieve its objectives for 2025, namely the recruitment of thirteen additional officers. At the coordination meeting, held on 15 October in Paris, you approved the organisation of a new information webinar for January 2025. The first one was broadcast exclusively in France. Given its success, is there any plan to open the next one to all Member States ?**

This webinar, initiated by France and Germany, was a great success, in particular because it was targeted. If the event is open to everyone, the content risks becoming too generic. By reducing the target audience, you can personalise the information provided. The public is also much more receptive and willing to ask questions. If thousands of people come from all over Europe, there would, in my opinion, be very few questions about concrete operational aspects. For me, the objective must remain pragmatic: to explain the mission, to share the experiences of those deployed in operational theatres and to answer questions in a very open manner. The worst thing to do would be to depict a situation at the external borders that has nothing to do with reality. The testimony of those who work in the field is therefore very important to prepare officers, especially new arrivals, for the reality of European borders.

**What are the major developments in Frontex's strategy that can be expected in the next five years ?**

The Agency is undergoing a significant transformation. We now have our own personnel, namely officers in the Standing Corps in uniform, armed, and with executive powers. We also have our own equipment. We are therefore increasingly becoming a partner of the Member States, and not just a manager of their resources. Furthermore, the creation of a standing unit is absolutely essential. Given the role of the Standing Corps, it is essential Frontex is identified with law enforcement and develops a relevant culture. We are here to serve the community of EU Member States as well as our own homes. Law enforcement culture is therefore becoming a much bigger goal. It is also imperative to take stock of our positioning, our mission, and the most effective actions operationally. It is thus essential to become an intelligence-led organisation, because both human and technical resources are

limited. We cannot expect to have everything we need. We will always have to prioritise, and we can already see this quite easily . For example, in the priority operational areas of Category 3, we are already satisfied with having 50% of the necessary resources. This simply means that we need to be very well informed about where we need to go or work and how to do it . Another strategic area is the development of Frontex's operational capabilities. These are mainly our own capabilities used by the Standing Corps, but also strategic capabilities such as aerial border surveillance, which are beyond the capabilities of the Member States and on which Frontex can support. Aerial surveillance is indeed an effective tool for European Union intelligence. We do not do this for Frontex, but for the Member States. The last point is to be a good employer, so that people want to come and work and build a career at the Agency. It is important to reassure officers, particularly uniformed forces, about their career prospects in five or ten years... At the moment, we operate under EU rules, which were not written for uniformed personnel. So, there is a lot of work to be done in cooperation with the European Commission.