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Migrants

Their borders.... Our deaths...

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The death of about thirty migrants in the English Channel on 24 November 2021, as well as the dramatic situation experienced by thousands of migrants on the border between Poland and Belarus a few weeks ago, show us that European countries are increasingly sinking into policies to repress migration, while their leaders are trying to shift the blame in one case to “smugglers”, in the other to “hostile countries”. Yet we can ask ourselves the question: why do so many migrants risk their lives in a sea as dangerous as the English Channel?

The cost of pushback operations

It is worth recalling that the Belgian police operation in which a two year old Kurdish child, Mawda, was killed, was part of a vast campaign to control border flows, involving significant police and financial resources between France, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Today, despite Brexit, these countries are still bound by an agreement on migration issues. “France has held the border for our British friends for more than 20 years,” French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin said recently. “We call on the British to keep their promise of funding since we hold the border for them.” [\[1\]](#)

The United Kingdom committed in late July to pay France 62.7 million euros in 2021-2022. “I asked the prefect for control staff all along the Belgian border, along the Nord department to the south of Valenciennes, to be able to arrest smugglers and migrants who want to leave Belgium to arrive in the north of France, in order to dry up the source. This strategy has proved its worth, in the month that it has been in place, we have doubled the number of smugglers arrested, 180 in September alone and doubled the number of migrants, from 1,800 to 4,000. We are asking our Belgian friends to do the same work on their side.” [\[2\]](#)

Since the end of 2018, crossings of the Channel by migrants seeking to reach the United Kingdom have multiplied despite the danger linked to the density of traffic, strong currents and low water temperatures. But they increasingly lead to arrests, bullying and degrading treatment on the beaches of departure or arrival and all kinds of violence against migrants in search of a haven of peace. Belgium has a significant share in this acceleration: the motorway areas from which migrants have tried to board trucks bound for England are truly militarized: fences, cameras and almost permanent patrols, controls in nearby places where migrants could shelter or receive help.

The new borders

The main consequence of these multiplying police operations is that migrants are driven to take increasingly long and dangerous routes. This had already been observed in the Mediterranean. In this case, the crossing of the English Channel by makeshift boats rather than by trucks, but this applies to other situations at all Europe’s borders. Another logical consequence of this militarization of borders is that smugglers are also getting richer, by increasing the prices of crossings which have been made more difficult.

Brexit and the enlargement of Europe have drawn new external borders to the EU and the Schengen Area. But new internal frontiers are also emerging. They are walls, barbed wire, controls. They seem to be drawn around each migrant wherever they go: on the platforms of stations and on trains, in ports, in airports. Free movement has never been so badly named.

Currently, the European Union accuses the regime of Alexander Lukashenko of orchestrating border crossings between Belarus and Poland, in retaliation for the European sanctions put in place. Poland has deployed more than 12,000 guards to its border with Belarus and is building a border wall there. 32 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany is calling on the EU to help Poland “secure its external border”. European countries are indignant around the theme of the defence of borders (of the EU and even NATO) against the “invasion” by migrants who are being “instrumentalized” by Belarus (and behind this Putin's Russia) which is grist to the mill for the far right. But which of these European countries are concerned about the fate of these thousands of migrants stranded between two front lines? And are they concerned about the daily violations of international law by their Greek, Croatian or Polish comrades in violation of the Geneva Convention, the principle of non-refoulement, international maritime law, Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the European directives on the right of asylum? [3] Who is still talking about the outcry over pushbacks, where even the European Commission has been forced to set up commissions and investigate?

The association [No Name Kitchen](#) documents police violence on the Croatian border and participates in the Border Violence Monitoring network. In October 2020, this organization published a damning report on the violence perpetrated by the Croatian police on asylum seekers. In particular, several cases of sexual violence had been recorded. In response, EU Internal Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson said she “takes the accusations very seriously.” She called in Zagreb for a “thorough investigation” into the violence after the publication of an Amnesty International report in June 2020. [4] What has changed since then?

What response will these countries give to the request of the twelve States of the European Union that have asked Brussels to finance the construction of barriers at their borders? [5] Their objective is to prevent the arrival of migrants. These barriers are described as “effective border protection measures” by the interior and migration ministers of these countries. Poland, like Lithuania, has begun to build barbed wire fences on part of its border with Belarus. Hungary had already erected this type of barrier on the border with Serbia and Croatia (an EU member country but not in Schengen) during the 2015 migration crisis. Slovenia did the same with Croatia.

There is no doubt that behind the beautiful words written on the packaging of European migration policies there is a common project around which European countries stand together, supporting each other. And for which the EU has set up a very well equipped but also very hermetic agency: Frontex. [6] Frontex has recruited an army of border guards who can carry and use firearms and aims to have 10,000 guards by 2027.

“Against migrants, still more technology”

It is not only ministers who are counting their money: the magazine *Reporterre* went to the Milipol security fair in Paris to find out about technological security innovations and noted that they are increasingly deployed to repel migrants. Robot dogs capable of running, climbing and swimming in extreme environments, tear gas canisters, facial recognition devices, assault rifles, thermal cameras, truck scanners integrated into the roadway and of course drones. The long-distance surveillance drone produced by the Belgian group John Cockerill can see up to 30 kilometres and is able to identify people very clearly. [7]

A juicy market (3.6 billion euros in France). “After suffering the health crisis like much of the global economy, the global internal security market is expected to rebound. Its growth forecast is 8% in 2021 and 6% in 2022, after a 3% decline in 2020. Some areas, such as surveillance drones, performed well with an increase of 5.8%.”

Make no mistake, all these techniques of policing asylum seekers can very well be used on a larger scale and for other population groups, especially in the event of “social unrest.”

Alternatives to racist and criminal migration policies

Let's have a clear break with these anti-migration and security policies that companies take advantage of by selling their new technologies and exploiting migrants and undocumented people in conditions of misery.

Gauche Anticapitaliste proposes:

- **The opening of borders, freedom of movement and settlement for all!**
- **The abolition of closed centres that are nothing more than prisons for people who have not committed any crime!**
- **100% free of charge care for all!**
- **Justice for all victims of police violence/abuse/homicide!**
- **The unconditional regularization of all undocumented people and the same rights for all!**

Translated from [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#).

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[1] "7sur7" – 10 October 2021.

[2] *Idem*. Darmanin said that "gendarmes have also been hired" and "technological means have been purchased to guard this border." In relation to Belgium, he said that "50% of migrants who want to cross from Calais and Dunkirk come from Belgium". According to the French authorities, some 15,400 migrants attempted the crossing between 1 January and 31 August, 3,500 of whom were "recovered in difficulty" in the strait and brought back to French shores. In 2020, crossings and attempted crossings involved some 9,500 people, compared to 2,300 in 2019 and 600 in 2018.

[3] The NGO Aegean Boat Report has documented the pushback operations conducted by the Greek authorities in the Aegean Sea. Since the beginning of this year, it has recorded 465 cases of pushback by the Greek coastguards.

[4] Amnesty International, June 2020 "[Croatia: Fresh evidence of police abuse and torture of migrants and asylum-seekers](#)".

[5] As the Commission prepares a reform of the Schengen Border Code – an area of free movement comprising 22 EU countries, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, ministers from Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia are calling for a "strong response to counter the instrumentalization of illegal immigration and hybrid threats... No third country should be able to use our asylum system to exert political pressure and blackmail the EU and its member states, or to exploit the current situation in Afghanistan."

[6] The budget for Frontex has increased by more than 7,560% since 2005, and 5.6 billion euros have been reserved to it for the 2021-2027 period.

[7] Reporterre.net – 27 October 2021.