

CROSSING BORDERS

movements and struggles of migration

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FrontExplode: Fighting the Borderregime



Never before did we experience a noborder camp at the borders of the EU at which political protests and social struggles for the freedom of movement were as intertwined as they were last August in Lesbos, Greece. A new dimension of migrant labour struggles appeared in the day without migrants in Italy at 1st of March. And both mobilisations (see page 6) have not only been extraordinary in their impacts. We rather consider both experiences as cornerstones in developing and intensifying a comprehensive struggle against modern apartheid: a migration-regime, which combines exclusion and deportation with exploitation and recruitment.

„No border lasts forever!“ That's the ambiguous title of a call recently published by the Network Welcome to Europe. On one hand it refers to the movements and the networks of migration, permanently undermining and challenging the border regime and the system of the nationstates. On the other hand the Noborder network – despite its diffuse structure – looks back at more than ten years of transnational mobilisations, perhaps even more vivid in continuous decentralised actions. The new call tries to interconnect the upcoming series of transnational mobilisations (see page 2), a main common reference is the struggle against Frontex: „5 years ago in May 2005, Frontex, the European border agency, started its work with a few pilot projects. Today, Frontex is permanently involved in

militarized sea- and land-operations against refugees and migrants on the European border as well as in the coordination of charter-deportations. Frontex is the driving force on different levels intensifying the repressive system of migration-control even beyond EU-borders. In their mission to combat so-called illegal migration, Frontex is willing to accept the death of thousands of refugees in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. Thus Frontex represents one of the main counterparts in our struggle for freedom of movement“ (find the call at ► www.noborder.org). Highlighting some main aspects of Frontex' function and role in the borderregime (see page 2 and 4) the new multilingual issue of crossing borders intends to contribute and to inspire these next months mobilisations and struggles.

In the meantime in the US, May Day 2010 has been the biggest since the Great American Boycott of 2006. Thousands of immigrants all over the country marched claiming "legalization now, stop deportations, no one is illegal" and expressing their voice as workers. The movement has been weakened after the partial victory of 2006, when a draconian law has been blocked, and now there is a mix of expectations and a necessity to fight back again, against the new Arizona law. Legalization is still to come and the struggle will be long, but there is no place where it is more clear that "immigrants' rights are workers rights" than in US.

It is clear: our struggle against Frontex is a transnational struggle, and what links struggles in Europe and in the US is more than solidarity. What is at stake in and around Europe has to be understood together with what happens in the US/Mexico border, the american working places and in other border regions in the world. Labor migration is a global process and everywhere similar control regimes against migrants threaten the freedom of all and weaken workers movements. But if borders are everywhere, we see that struggles of migration are everywhere, too. It's up to us to think transnationally in this multi-situated struggle: let's make our part, let's FrontExplode!

Transnational newsletter
8th issue, May 2010

New transnational chain of actions

Coming months another series of protests and actions will take place all over Europe and beyond. The struggle against the European border regime and the demand for freedom of movement is in common in all the mobilisations:

Join the **conference and protest in Warsaw on the 23rd and 24th of May**, when Frontex cynically celebrates its 5th anniversary with the „Day of the Border Guard“, also showing an exhibition “Surveillance Technology for Border Control”, see more soon at ► www.noborder.org

Join the **week of actions against the deportation machinery** from 1st to 6th of June, a week of decentralized protests against charter deportations and Frontex, see ► stopdeportation.net/node/41

Join the **Caravan-Festival in Jena from 4th to 6th of June**: „Unite against colonial injustice in

memory of the dead victims of Fortress Europe“, see ► www.karawane-festival.org

Join the **European Social Forum in Istanbul from 1st to 4th of July** with workshops and protests against Frontex and the externalisation of the EU-border regime, see more soon at ► www.noborder.org

Join the **swarming noborder activities in Greece from 25th of August until 12th of September 2010**, where the biggest sea-operation of Frontex is announced and also their involvement in new screening-centers and in coordinating charter deportations on the islands of Lesbos and Samos, see ► lesvos09.antira.info

Join the **nobordercamp in Brussels from 24h of September to 3rd of October** with actions against the EU-migration-regime in the decision-making-center of EU, see ► nobordersbxl.noblogs.org

Join the **remembrance in Melilla in the days before the 7th of October**, with a conference in Oujda, see more soon at ► www.noborder.org

Sea operations, EuroSUR and new border technologies: Frontex – the driving force in the war against Boatpeople and Sans Papiers

The context was clearly set in the Stockholm programme, the new five-year-programme for Justice and Home Affairs of the EU-Council, adopted last December: „Europe will need a flexible and demand-driven labour immigration policy, responsive to the needs of Member States' national labour markets... Europe needs a strategic and systematic use of all available instruments of the EU Global Approach to Migration - migration profiles, migration missions, cooperation platforms on migration and development and Mobility partnerships - for long-term cooperation on all dimensions of this policy in close partnership with selected third countries along priority migratory routes ...“. The crucial actor was mentioned often in the paper too: Frontex. According to the program the strengthening of the European Border Agency is a key issue.

It has been apparent from the beginning that sea borders have a particular significance for Frontex. The first major joint operations after the establishment of the agency in 2004 took place at sea borders, and it was those operations which rapidly grew both in scope and duration. It is also reflected in the budgets, where spendings on maritime operations have always constituted the largest item. The special attention that Frontex devotes to the sea borders might stem from their



special character: there is no clear borderline with border posts and barriers; instead they are a broad, diffuse area, a “blurred border of the rule of law” – an excellent experimentation ground for an agency which is seeking to invent, test and ultimately establish a new form of “border management”. The rights and often also the lives of migrants are lost in the middle of this process. Thousands die at sea and due to illegal pushbacks, so called „interceptions and diversions“, are the daily business of Frontex: be it at the coasts of West Africa (operation Hera), in the Mediterranean Sea (operation Nautilus) or around the Aegean Islands (operation Poseidon). Of course the Spanish, Italian or Greek border

guards still play a central and often worse role in blocking and returning refugees and migrants to Senegal, Libya or Turkey. But a militarized Frontex armada does not only tolerate the life-threatening practice of hunting down and illegally deporting refugees and migrants. Frontex moderates, coordinates and evaluates this war against migrants in order to ultimately shape a new practice of deterrence.

„Furthermore Frontex is responsible to develop the European Border Surveillance System (EuroSUR) with a view to ensuring that the necessary cooperation is established between the Member States and with Frontex to share surveillance data relating to the eastern and southern borders no later than 2013“ (Stockholm programme). Land border and airport operations of Frontex are still limited or often even on a level of pilot projects only. But as explicitly described in the Stockholm programme, Frontex is expected to assess what European border management under joint responsibility is really supposed to mean. EuroSUR is the name of an ambitious, comprehensive surveillance system, and its development is supposed to be enforced by any technological means necessary! Satellites and drones, every equipment available should be used and „integrated“ into this larger system. High-tech companies are called to develop particular instruments. „The possibilities of new technologies hold great potential for rendering border management more efficient as well as more secure. This includes inter alia the use of gates for

automated border control. The European Council takes note of the ongoing studies of Frontex in this field and encourages the Agency to continue its work in order to establish best practice. ...“ This quotation from the Stockholm programme does not refer to the outwards borders only. Frontex and the EU Commission are both aware that the majority of those who are living in the EU despite the lack of proper residence permits initially entered legally but simply did not leave when their visas expired (the so called “visa-overstayer”). Subsequently, a new „Entry-Exit“ system has already been proposed 2 years ago, which in conjunction with the upcoming Visa Information System will allow for the tracking of individuals within the European population, relying heavily on biometric technology.

Frontex has learned during the last years and attempts to improve its increasingly bad reputation. They present themselves as neutral agency, solely providing technologies to establish „best practices“. They even utilize the human rights discourse by pretending that their measures help to save boat people. But these empty rhetorics cannot hide their true task. Be it against Sans Papiers inside the EU or against boat people at the outer borders of the EU, Frontex maintains a manifolded key-position „combatting illegal migration“. Consequently, the new call of the network welcome to Europe states: „Frontex represents one of the main counterparts in our struggle for freedom of movement“. Lets fight them by any means necessary!



Campaigning against Frontex – how to do?!

- Help to distribute this newsletter, other existing materials and the film against Frontex, which you find at ►<http://frontexplode.eu/>
- Help in critical researches about frontex outer border operations and frontex charter deportations to be published at frontexwatch: ►<http://frontex.antira.info/>
- Follow and disturb the representatives of Frontex in public events and seminars and trainings (as happened in Lübeck, Bremen and London)!
- Follow to disturb Frontex operations as it was tried in Lesbos!
- Include protests against Frontex in anti-deportation actions at airports!
- Denounce the high-tech-companies, which collaborate with and deliver the surveillance equipment for Frontex - see the campaign in Bremen ►<http://ziviles-bremen.noblogs.org/>
- Take part in one or more mobilisations mentioned at the frontpage of this issue!
- Join the starting preparations for protest-caravans to the World Social Forum in Dakar/Senegal in February 2011 with Anti-Frontex-activities in West-Africa!
- Be creative with FrontExplode!

Frontex – an agency for deportation?

One of the tasks Frontex is known for is the "interception" of migrants by joint patrols and operations at the EU borders. But one of the main problems is: What will EU member states do with the "intercepted" migrants? It is not so easy to push them back to the non-EU country where they are coming from if there is no readmission agreement, especially concerning transit migrants. Also there is criticism from human rights organizations that any "refoulement" of migrants, who could be "real" refugees/ asylum seekers, is illegal (see the latest decision of the anti-torture-commission of the Council of Europe against deportations to Libya by joint patrols with Italy). To send migrants back to countries of origin is often even more difficult, if they have no documents and/or there is no readmission agreement. And deportations by plane are expensive and often lead to resistance, not only from deportees, but also from passengers and members of the crew.

All these are reasons why EU member states invented a lot of measures:

~ to "identify" migrants in hearings with embassies and dubious "experts" – but there were protests of concerned migrants and antiracist groups,

~ to put pressure on third countries to sign "cooperation agreements" – but there was and is resistance, also from governments interested in remittances from their nationals in EU countries, ~ to organize "joint return operations" – but there were demonstrations and actions at airports like 2008 in Hamburg, from where at least eight joint deportations to African countries took place, 2009 in London and 2010 in Vienna, and against airlines like Air Berlin, which deported people to Vietnam in June 2009 after interrogations in Poland and Germany with participation of Vietnamese secret police and two people of

Frontex.



Frontex started to coordinate and to improve such measures by organizing training on how to carry out interrogations and charter deportations and by exchanging staff. Since 2006, Frontex is directly involved in assisting charter deportations (a joint flight from Germany was described here: ►<http://www.zeit.de/2008/03/Abschiebeflug>). In 2009, Frontex coordinated and partly financed 32 "joint return operations" of at least 1570 individuals. This represented a tripling in joint expulsions since 2007. Most of the flights went to African countries like Nigeria, Cameroun and Gambia, some to Kosovo and Albania, and Britain and France also tried joint deportations to Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2009, Frontex spent 5,25 Mio. € on "Return cooperation", of which 1,7 Mio € were used for interrogations to identify migrants in order to get travelling certificates. In 2010, this budget was increased to 9,341 Mio. €, and Frontex wants to organize twice as many joint deportations as in 2009 and plans to buy their own planes.

In Greece, Frontex started in 2009 a return capacity building project called Attica. "The aim of

the project was to bring assistance in identification, acquisition of travel documents and returning illegally present third-country nationals to their home countries. Focus was also on the development of national return-related procedures, enhancing expertise and improvement of co-operation with third countries. The pilot project was running for three months, during which a fully operational Return Coordination Centre was set up, co-operation with Nigerian and Georgian embassies was fostered and identification process has been properly running. Greece commenced participation in joint return operations to Nigeria and Georgia with 22 returnees. The project will be continued in 2010." On Greek islands like Lesbos and Samos, Frontex staff disguised as journalists, human rights activists or translators try to find out and/or change the nationality of migrants without papers

or increase the age of minors in order to make deportations possible. New is that such "screening" already takes place before migrants can apply for asylum which means that those who are not wanted in Europe, are sorted out for deportation directly after arrival. Governments pretend to fulfill the conditions of international human rights agreements by doing so, but in reality it is just a modernization of the repressive and selective migration regime. 126 out of 150 migrants in the detention center of Samos started a hunger strike on the 12th of April 2010 against these measures and against beating of a refugee by the guards.

Against these policies organizations in different EU countries call for a European Week of Action against the Deportation Machine from the 1st - 6th June 2010.

Azadi* - Nobordercamp in Lesbos 2009



Both time and place of the noborder camp in Greece were well-chosen. Lesbos island is a key site in the external border regime of the EU: Each night new refugee boats arrived and the detention centre at Pagani had been suffering from overcrowding for weeks. Greek border guards and Frontex were on patrol around the clock. Around 600 activists from many different countries had travelled to Lesbos for the week of protests last year August.

"Tomorrow when we continue our journey, we will be refugees again. But up until our very last moments here tonight we will be just people, friends celebrating together. Who would've thought that on this island we wouldn't have to hide in the woods, instead encountering the gift of a night of freedom amongst friends!"

These words speak volumes. They are the words of a young Afghani man on the last night of the noborder camp. Within a few days a self-organised 'Welcome Centre' became the meeting point for paperless newcomers and released detainees. Noborder activists wanting to confront

the border regime politically could come together with those, whose journey to Europe was a practical challenge to those borders. Through this process, refugees and activists were able to break through language barriers and organise mutual support as well as collective political action, for example for the Frontex action day in the harbour. Refugees and activists painted a huge multi-language 'Freedom of Movement' banner. Activists in 50 paddle boats attempted to surround the Coastguard. Of course the Greek coast guards were 'nice enough' to display their finesse in making waves that push back refugee boats at high sea. At the same time the demo against Frontex started, led - amongst others - by activists from Mali and Mauritania, who in West Africa are also faced with Frontex.

A young woman from Somalia summarized her experience: "When I left Somalia, I started my journey to find a safer and better place to live. (...) I can now see more clearly what Europe is like at present (...). We are thrown into horrific prisons and Europe sends its troops to fight us at sea. I have never learned so much in such a short time. (...) I began my second journey here, seeing all the others who sit in the same little boats and fight for survival and to get further. (...) I have been able to see what it would be like if we all embarked on the journey together. Maybe to another place that might exist somewhere in the future."

**Azadi is farsi and means freedom. It was shouted everyday in the internment-camp of Pagani, where hundreds of afghanish young men and families have been detained. Find more informations and reports about the nobordercamp Lesbos at ►<http://lesvos09.antira.info> and at ►<http://transact.noblogs.org/post/2009/10/06/shut-down-pagani-azadi-english-version>*

No to the Stockholm program! Protest in Brussels last December

"Stop another 5 years program of death and detention! Refugee Protection and Migrants Rights instead of a brutal EU-Borderregime!" These have been the central demands in a small manifestation in front of the European Council against the adoption of the next 5-year-framework for Justice and Home Affairs. In a transnational composition of speakers the new program was denounced as a „road map“ for a tighter regime of surveillance and control, escalating the deathly borderregime to a real war by strengthening Frontex' role in militarising the borders. In reference to the daily struggles of refugees and migrants against exclusion and exploitation, against detention and discrimination, it was reclaimed, that we need another Europe in a world with equal global rights on a social and political level. See the report at ► http://www.noborder.org/archive_item.php?id=461



March 1st: the strike as the present and the future of antiracist struggles

March 1st has been an important day for migrants' struggles in Europe. Everything started with the French "day without immigrants" that recalled the "Great American Boycott" of 2006, when millions of migrants in the US demonstrated against the anti-immigrants law. In Italy a group of women, migrant and Italian, picked up the idea, followed by migrants' collectives, autonomous groups, antiracist movements and people involved for the first time in migrants' struggles. After the Rosarno riots, march 1st was also an answer to institutional racism.

We created the "Coordinamento per il Lavoro migrante in Italia", that involved many autonomous collectives, in order to push forward for the strike. Despite the hesitation or the open opposition of some part of the movement and the unions concerning a strike against the Bossi-Fini law (the law that links the residence permit with the labor contract), assemblies with migrants and Italian workers and union delegates were organized. Many Italian workers understood that migrants' deportability and legal blackmailing is a threat to all workers; the erosion of migrants' freedom through the 'Security Law' is a threat to everyone's freedom. Our perspective was transnational, both because immigration laws have an European dimension and because migrant labor's struggle are transnational in their very essence.

On march 1st the strike of migrant labor involved dozens of factories and other working places. Strikers, backed or not by their union, were joined in demonstrations of 10.000 people in Brescia and Bologna. In other Italian cities, including Milan and Naples, there were big demonstrations.

After this strike beyond unions' representation, we believe that the migrant labor strike is a new kind of strike; we believe that the strike should be the present and the future of antiracist struggles.

See also: "10 thesis on migrant labor" ► <http://lavoromigrante.splinder.com>
and ► www.coordinamentomigranti.splinder.com for pictures and report of the strike in Bologna