

Contingency Planning

The subject of planning for the future, where and how to deploy border guards and technical assets for optimal efficiency, was a timely subject for this year's ED4BG and one wholeheartedly embraced by the speakers.

From what moderator Dr. Gil Ad Ariely of the Lauder School of Government Diplomacy and Strategy called "drastic geo-political changes" such as the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, to predicting air-traffic growth, trying to prepare for unforeseeables like volcanic eruptions or sudden economic changes that can affect border movements, the ability to see and think ahead has never been more valuable. He promised the panel would focus not on theoretical concepts but on the practical realities of the job.

"You cannot talk about the future unless you know what's happening now," said Mari Juritsch, head of Frontex's Analysis and Planning Sector, starting off the discussion. "A criticism we get quite often is that risk analysis is obsessed with the past," she continued. "We need to understand the situation in order to say something sensible, sound and justified about the future." Frontex projections are not guesswork she emphasised but are based on sound knowledge.

Presenting Frontex's role in assisting member states with forward-planning, she admitted: "Our future perspective is not a very long perspective," explaining that Frontex risk analysis centred on the coming 12 to 24 months. These analyses form the basis of operational planning and are essentially forward-looking for that reason. She went on to clarify that Frontex does not make predictions. Rather, through risk analysis, the agency seeks to identify key drivers of change, which of those drivers can be influenced by border control and who the principal actors involved are. In this way, Frontex can seek to "transform" the future rather than merely adapting to it.

In terms of contingency planning, and citing the latest Annual Risk Analysis, she said the focus was on what is certain to happen that would affect the work of border guards. Next came likely events: "We know what the hot-spots are but we don't know what the volumes or compositions of flows will be." Then come the unknowns, with the emphasis on the 'known unknowns:' "Things we are dealing with, like Libya, Syria and now Ukraine. There is an uncertainty but what that means to us exactly is very difficult to determine because things are very dynamic and complex indeed."

'Unknown unknowns' she said were a luxury that Frontex couldn't afford to analyse and were not covered in operational planning. Volcanoes, natural and man-made disasters all have an effect, but by their nature are impossible to predict. Planning on the basis of possible futures would lead to inefficient allocation of resources and budgetary waste; this was an area best left to contingency planners. Frontex, by keeping a close eye on uncertainties and "reading the signals," could keep decision-makers informed of emerging risks and trends, and this was



the main link between the agency's risk analysis activities and the realm of contingency planning.

Henrik Nielsen, from the EC Directorate General Home Affairs, Border Management and Schengen, approached the subject of planning effectively for unforeseeable events. He started by recounting the many events that had taken Europe by surprise over the years and that prove the need for contingency planning. "That goes both for external events like Syria or Libya but also for the massive but unforeseen financial crisis of 2008 and its impact on legal travel as well as irregular migration."

At European level, there are some elements of contingency planning: "We have well-known tools available – emergency funding [...] Frontex's rapid border intervention teams," both of which were established to deal with unforeseeable events. However, these tools were not created based on any specific contingency planning in terms of identifying specific needs. "They were, without being too cynical, based on what we could agree on," he admitted. "What resources were the member states prepared to pool for the intervention teams, what financial resources were they ready to make available for a future emergency fund? Those were the driving factors." When it came to planning for specifics, however, "One would have to be honest and say we don't really have European planning of that kind."

He tempered that criticism by saying it was unfair to lay the blame at the feet of the EU. It was, after all, for the member states to manage their own borders and Brussels should not be expected to carry all the weight, or accept all the blame. It would have to be a joint effort in terms of planning but also of tools. He also pointed out that if existing systems – legislation, equipment, resources, training – are not sufficiently robust to cope with the everyday demands of border control, which is a massive task in itself then what effective contingency planning is possible? "If the basic system is not robust, it will not survive an external shock."

The next speaker, Richard Warnes, a doctoral researcher at the University of Surrey, took up the same point. The multitude of tasks and responsibilities placed on the modern border-guard, he said, made contingency planning more important than ever. Limited personnel and resources made the need to allocate those resources efficiently paramount. Highlighting that some 98 percent of all border control concerns regular short-term travel, he said these were growing while the irregular flows were much more demanding in terms of border guards' time. Referring to the 2014 Annual Risk Analysis, he noted the varying factors and risks and the added burdens placed on these 'first responders' for everything from life-saving to receiving asylum claims, all the time with shrinking resources. "With all of those varied responsibilities, contingency planning is absolutely essential in helping identify the most significant and pressing things to respond to."

The moderator then challenged the speakers say whether future challenges could be predicted at all and, if so, whether that reduces the need for contingency planning. What approaches and methods would be relevant?



Frontex's Mari Juritsch again referred to the unaffordable luxury of predicting 'out-of-the-blue' unknowables. Instead, Frontex concentrated on uncertainties and identifying their drivers, monitoring and assessing them on the basis of accumulated knowledge, which she considered a vital contribution.

Henrik Nielsen revisited the earlier theme of transforming rather than adapting to the future. Knowing the current situation must always be the starting point, he agreed, but imagining different scenarios is indispensable. Here there is a psychological barrier in that people do not like to speculate about bad futures, but possible scenarios are invaluable in developing the necessary tools. Realising that existing tools are sometimes sufficiently robust in this respect may be enough, he argued, but in other cases new tools may need to be developed. Contingencies were not so much about predicting the future as being prepared for it.

Technology

In response to further questions from the moderator, speakers gave their views on the role of technology and whether it addresses, solves or creates contingencies, including with regard to its "socio-technological implications." Richard Warnes answered that it was fundamental to first create a culture of information intelligence-sharing and international cooperation, emphasising, "relevant information from member states is essential to shorter-term risk analysis or futures methodologies."

Integration of an experienced professional with the latest technologies is the best way forward, a number of studies have suggested, but Richard Warnes cautioned that, "Given the increasing demands we've mentioned before [...] technology can be a marvellous tool. On the other hand we have to acknowledge that the training, the expertise and perhaps most importantly the inherent knowledge, the tacit understanding, the intuition that border guards have developed over years of experience, maybe a sixth sense, is critical." There has to be a balance, he warned: "If we become over-reliant on technology then if technology fails you've got a big problem." Quoting someone he described as a tactical intervention specialist, he said: "You can have the most advanced technology in the world but if you don't match that with the experience and training of the operator, it's mere window-dressing."