

## Discussion Panel II: Known Unknowns

### Walls and Gates or Eyes and Ears

“There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.”


United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's now legendary 2002 quote provided the panellists at ED4BG with a chance to talk about the things we know we don't know about border security, focussing in particular on human smuggling and trafficking, but moderator Milo Jones also wanted to know how we can know the things we don't know.

Addressing Antonio Saccone, Head of the Operational Analysis and Evaluation Sector within Frontex's Risk Analysis Unit, Jones expressed his surprise that, “Frontex does not know everything that individual European countries know.”

Saccone responded: “We've been quite successful over the last ten years in building up knowledge.” In 2003, he said, a common model was agreed and established involving methodology, common definitions and a reporting system for Member States and Frontex to collect and analyse data. But even with the investment of resources and effort to detect illegal border crossings it is “difficult to forecast how much we need to know.”

Rey Koslowski, a political scientist from the State University of New York, injected a question he said he had been asking for some time concerning global mobility: “Those statistics of what ‘can’ be known but is still unknown,” like the total number of the world's travellers. He said the United Nations does not collect data regarding the total number of people crossing borders, something Jones said was “eminently knowable.”

In the EU's case Koslowski felt accurate statistics about how many people enter and leave were necessary and Saccone agreed, saying that the estimates of ‘overstayers’ were unreliably poor. “We don't have an entry/exit system, so this is one of the things we should solve,” he said, stressing the need to establish effective links with European consular authorities to do so.





Jonathan Cave, a game theorist and economist at the University of Warwick, said the collection of data, such as entries and exits, was important, but when trying to understand the reasons why people come, any selection bias when interviewing travellers, both legally and illegally, had to be avoided or else policies could be affected as a result of building the “wrong kind of models.”

With 20 years of social research experience, Sarah Webb’s studies in this area seem particularly apposite, especially her interviews with convicted immigration criminals in the UK, published in a Home Office report in 2009. “We spoke to the people who’d got caught. That doesn’t tell you very much about who didn’t get caught,” she said.

Intriguingly, Jones added: “It is actually in the interest of smart smugglers for dumb people-smugglers to be caught.” Cave’s own work has concluded that when it is the inexperienced novices who get caught it does two things, firstly reducing competition for the smart ones thereby increasing their profits. And, “it also gives you a distorted view of how smart these people are,” ultimately turning it from a ‘mom and pop’ smuggling operation into a smarter, more industrialised and sophisticated version.

On the other hand, Cave assured the audience, there are also “two pay-offs” in catching immigration criminals. The first is the direct pay-off of stopping an instance of smuggling, but there is valuable information that is acquired as well. He used the analogy that border guards are “walls and gates and gatekeepers” while at the same time they can be “eyes and ears.”

Webb highlighted the need to learn more about and distinguish between smugglers and traffickers, which Saccone believed could be achieved by, in coordination with a variety of police forces, finding out what happens inland, about those hidden in other jurisdictions, long before the smugglers and traffickers get to the border.

With many of the unknowns identified, Jones turned to the question of what role technology may play.

On the technological efforts employed in the USA, Koslowski was quick to bury the costly “Virtual Fence,” an array of 1,800 towers with sensors and cameras along a section of its border with Mexico. “It didn’t work out,” he said, though he was more upbeat about unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles and developments coming out of US defence research.



However, Jones said, “I’m deeply sceptical of tech fixes” and when Saccone warned of neglecting human intelligence, that is information gathered by people, Jones suggested more funds for people like Sarah Webb rather than expensive tech systems. Koslowski countered quickly: “Don’t get me wrong, I’ve been quite critical of looking to technology as ‘the’ solution,” but suggested military tech could and should be used in concert with human intelligence.

Throwing the discussion open to the audience, a Frontex colleague of Saccone added another unknown about organised smuggling rings and how they were so successful, which the panel concurred was exactly where gathering more information would help.

To conclude, an audience member cut to the chase asking what the priority should be. Jones asked for an answer from each panellist one by one:

Cave was clear, “Where do you start? Where there is the most yet to do.”

“It’s the labour market,” said Koslowski because if there is a demand for labour, people will always find their way in.

“There has to be some concern and some focus on protecting vulnerable people who are deeply harmed by the activities of both smugglers and traffickers and the abuse that takes place,” Webb maintained.

Saccone based his answer on his own policing experience and said the issue was the pervasive criminal aspect.