Surveillance technologies at European borders
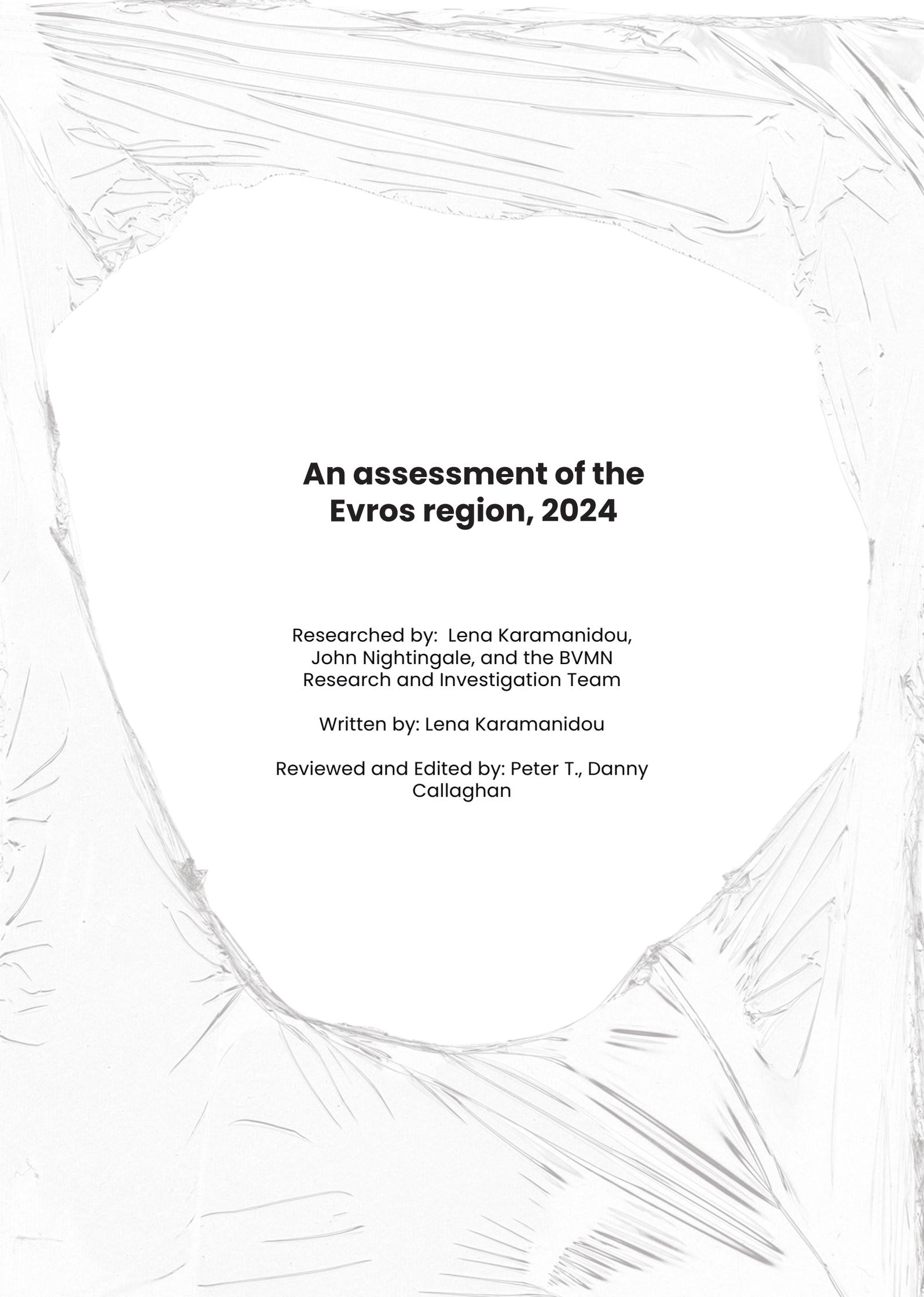
Assessment on Evros

European Philanthropic Initiative for Migration

Border Violence Monitoring Network

An assessment of the Evros region, 2024

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For a while now, civil society organizations have been denouncing the dangers of the use of new technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the field of migration and border control, including the deployment of intrusive surveillance technology and the collection of biometric data from people on the move. The lack of transparency and regulation surrounding these processes and their impact results in a lack of accountability on the part of the authorities, tech companies, as well as public research institutions, as it poses severe difficulties in the monitoring of likely violations of human rights. The recently adopted EU Artificial Intelligence Act is a missed opportunity to safeguard against the harms of intrusive AI. Instead, it excludes the field of migration and law enforcement from important regulations. This report is one in a series of research publications produced by the members of the Border Violence Monitoring Network, with the objective of expanding the knowledge and evidence of new technologies being used as part of the European migration regime. With a lack of concrete case studies and research from countries along the so-called Balkan Route, we look into the developments in border surveillance in these regions and analyze the (actual and potential) harmful impacts of these technologies on people crossing borders.

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List of abbreviations

- ABSS   Automated Border Surveillance System
- AI   Amnesty International
- ATM   Alien Traffic Mapping
- BCP   Border Crossing Point
- BGD   Border Guard Department
- BVMI   Border Management and Visa Instrument
- BVMN   Border Violence Monitoring Network
- CPT   Committee for the Prevention of Torture
- DPIA   Data Protection Impact Assessment
- EBF   External Borders Fund
- ET   Eparchiakos Typos
- FRO   Fundamental Rights Officer
- FRM   Fundamental Rights Monitors
- GCR   Greek Council for Refugees
- GNCHR   Greek National Commission for Human Rights
- HDPA   Hellenic Data Protection Authority
- HRW   Human Rights Watch
- IOM   International Organisation for Migration
- ISF   Internal Security Fund
- MCP   Ministry of Citizen Protection
- MIAR   Ministry of the Interior and Administrative Reform
- MMA   Ministry of Migration and Asylum
- PoM   People on the Move
- PRDC   Pre-Removal Detention Centre
- RIC   Reception and Identification Centre
- TVV   Thermovision Van
- UAM   Unaccompanied Minor

1.Introduction

1.1 Migration movements in Evros

Greece, historically a country of emigration, has nevertheless been a destination for labour migrants and people seeking protection since the 1970s[1]. Its accession to the European Community in 1981 and to the Schengen Agreement in 1992 – entered into force in 2000 – rendered Greece an entry point into the European Union (then the European Community)[2]. The collapse of the Eastern bloc in the early 1990s led to increased migratory movements to the country, including Albanian nationals – the largest group in the 1990s –, ethnically Greek returnees, and nationals of Balkan countries and formerly Soviet republics[3]. People fleeing conflicts, oppression and poverty in countries of the Global South have been arriving in Greece since the 1990s[4]. In 2015, 856,723 people fleeing the civil war in Syria arrived mainly by sea, compared to 41,038 the year before.[5] Arrivals and asylum applications since then have been fewer due to a number of factors, such as the EU-Turkey agreement, the Covid 19 pandemic and a policy of systematic pushbacks.

In this context, Evros, the land border between Greece and Turkey, became a key route for People on the Move [PoM]. Turkish and Kurdish people escaping oppression in Turkey were among the main nationalities crossing this border during the late 1980s and 1990s and have remained so to the present day.[6] Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals have equally featured often among border crossers since the 1990s[7]. From the 1990s onwards, migratory movements through Evros reflected armed conflicts and oppressive regimes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Turkey and later Syria as well as Eritrea[8].

Crossings increased in the early 2000 but shifted to the Aegean islands by the middle of the decade, possibly because of intensified policing and the high death toll due to mines in the Evros river area[9]. However, entry routes shifted back to Evros because of Operation Poseidon Sea, implemented by Frontex and the Greek authorities in the Aegean, and the demining of the riverine Evros area[10]. Crossings waned after the reinforcement of the border in the early 2010s and the deployment of Frontex, but have increased since 2017, unlike the Aegean islands, Evros was excluded from the scope of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement[11].

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1   Kasimis, C, and Kassimi, C. (2004) Greece: A History of Migration, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-history-migration; Dimitriadi, A. (2013) Transit and Migration in Greece: The Case of Afghan, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Migrants, Athens: Nissos Academic Publishing

2   Ibid; Samatas, M. (2004) Greece in 'Schengenland': Blessing or anathema for citizens' and foreigners' rights? Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 29 (1): 141-156

3   Dimitriadi, ibid; Kasimis and Kassimi, ibid

4   Dimitriadi; ibid

5   ibid

6   Papadopoulou, A. (2004) "Smuggling into Europe: Transit Migrants in Greece," Journal of Refugee Studies, 17(2): 167–184; Respondent 2

7   Evidence drawn from local newspaper articles between 1991 and 2002, seen at the Municipal Library of Alexandroupoli, January 2024

8   Dimitiradi 2013; Karamanidou, L. and Kasparek, B .(2022)) From Exception to Extra-Legal Normality: Pushbacks and Racist State Violence against People Crossing the Greek–Turkish Land Border, State Crimes Journal, 11(1):12-32, https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/statecrime.11.1.0012

9   Paratiritis (2003) Evros won't become a rubbish bin for illegal immigrants, 03 March https://www.paratiritis-news.gr/news/o-evros-den-tha-ginei-kalathi-lathrometanaston/ Kasparek, B. (2021) Europa als Grenze. Eine Ethnographie der Grenzschutz-Agentur Frontex,- Bielefeld: transcript;

10   MCP (2010) Dealing with irregular migration in Evros, https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/7210756.pdf; Del Biaggio, C. and Campi, A. (2013) Regards sur les migrants de longue distance en Grèce, L'Espace Politique, 20 (2), https://journals.openedition.org/espacepolitique/2675

11   Ulusoy, O. Baldwin-Edwards, M. and Last, T. (2019) "Border Policies and Migrant Deaths at the Turkish–Greek Border," New Perspectives on Turkey, 60(1): 3–32; Interviews with police directors, 2018

Yet again, crossings appeared to decline after the border spectacle of February and March, during which Greece's police and army responded with violence to attempts of PoM to cross the border after the Turkish government decided to stop controlling exit at the land border[12]. While the deployment of a Frontex Rapid Border Intervention and the Covid 19 pandemic may have had an impact, crossings increased again in subsequent years despite a policy of systematic pushbacks, while strandings on islets on the river became a common pattern in 2022 and 2023[13]. Despite claims that crossings were reduced to zero in late 2023, by early summer 2024 they appear on the increase[14].

Table 1: Arrivals and asylum applications in Greece

Year	Arrivals – Greece[15]	Asylum applications – Greece[16]
2015	861,630	13,185
2016	177,234	51,034
2017	36,310	58,619
2018	50,508	66,915
2019	74,613	77,228
2020	15,696	40,471
2021	9,157	28,272
2022	18,780	37,337
2023	48,721	64,212

12   Amnesty International [AI] (2020) Caught in a Political Game https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/2077/2020/en; Human-Rights360 (2020) During and After the Crisis: Evros Border Monitoring Report, https://www.humanrights360.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/During-After-Crisis-Evros_FINAL.pdf
13   Border Violence Monitoring Network [BVMN] (2022) ; Islets, Interim Measures, and Illegal Pushbacks: Erosion of Rule of Law in Greece https://borderviolence.eu/reports/20548-2/
GCR (2023) At Europe's Borders: Between Impunity and Criminalisation, https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/GCR_Pushback_Criminalization_Report.pdf;
14   MMA (2023) Dimitris Kairides: Reduction of illegal arrivals in October – What does the agreement with Turkey mean? 01 November, https://migration.gov.gr/dimitris-kairidis-meiosi-ton-paranomon-afixeon-ton-oktovrio-ti-simainei-i-synennoisi-me-toyrkia/; Interview 2; Kathimerini (2024) Migration flows at highest since 2019, 16 June, https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1241844/migration-flows-at-highest-since-2019/
15   UNHCR (2024) Mediterranean Situation: Greece, https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179
16   MMA (2024) Statistics https://migration.gov.gr/statistika/

Table 2: Registrations at the Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre. 2015-2023

Year	Registrations
2015	5,210
2016	4,132
2017	6,025
2018	13,196
2019	14,257
2020	5,476
2021	4,849
2022	6,456
2023	7,079

1.2 Policy Developments

1.2.1: Policy development in Greece

Since the 1990s, policy developments in Greece reflected a process of Europeanisation of legal frameworks and policies, as well as a securitised approach to migratory movements[17]. Domestic legislation adopted between 1991 and 2005 aimed at strengthening capacity for policing the border, detention and deportation[18]. At the same time, early EU instruments on migration and asylum – such as the Dublin Convention (later Regulation), the Schengen Convention and the 2002 Council Framework Decision on facilitation – started being incorporated into the Greek legal order, followed by EU regulations and the CEAS directives since the late 2000s[19]. The Greek government signed a bilateral readmission agreement with Turkey in 2002, allowing for the quick expulsion of people deemed to have no claim to asylum, which in Evros was implemented at the Kipoi Border Crossing Point (BCP)[20]. In response to infringement proceedings initiated by the European Commission in 2009, the Greek government adopted a National Plan for Asylum and Migration to address deficiencies in border management, asylum systems and human rights violations, especially related to detention conditions[21].

17   Cheliotis, L (2013) Behind the veil of philoxenia: The politics of immigration detention in Greece, European Journal of Criminology, 10 (6): 725–745; Dimitriadi 2013; Karamanidou, L. (2021) 'Migration, Asylum Policy and Global Justice in Greece', in: Ceccorulli, M., Fassi, E. and Lucarelli, S. (eds) The EU Migration System of Governance: Justice on the Move, Cham: Springer International Publishing AG.
18   ibid
19   Dimitriadi 2013; Karamanidou 2021
20   ibid; Hellenic Republic (2002) Law 3030/2002 Protocol for the implementation of Article 8 of the Agreement between the Government of the Hellenic Republic and the Government of the Republic of Turkey on combating crime, especially terrorism, organised crime, illicit drug trafficking and illegal migration, https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/diethneis-sunthekes/nomos-3030-2002-phek-163a-15-7-2002.html; AI (2011) Greece: Briefing to Committee against Torture. Available online at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCAT%2fNGO%2fGRC%2f48%2f8930&Lang=en
21   MCP (2010) Greece sends its national action plan for migration management to the European Commission, 25 August, copy with author; Dimitriadi 2013

The asylum system was reformed in 2011 and responsibilities for examining and deciding on asylum applications were transferred from the police to two independent authorities – the Asylum Service and the Appeals Authority[22]. Another independent authority, the First Reception Service, later renamed Reception and Identification Service, took over reception tasks such as identification, medical examinations, vulnerability assessments and psychosocial support[23]. Other measures included the establishment of Pre-Removal Detention Centres [PRDCs] and reception facilities (later renamed Reception and Identification Centres [RICs])[24].

Despite initial humanitarian responses to the dramatic increase in arrivals in 2015 and 2016, policies soon reverted to further securitisation and illegalisation, reflecting EU concerns over preventing crossings and secondary movements towards Central and Northern Europe[25]. Following the EU-Turkey deal in 2016, a law was introduced to formalise arrangements such as the hotspot system, whereby PoM were contained in camps on the Aegean islands before transfer to the mainland or deportation to Turkey[26]. Under the conservative New Democracy governments since 2019, border and migration policies have been further securitised. Detention infrastructures were expanded with the consolidation of mainland facilities and the establishment of Closed Controlled Access Centres [CCAs][27]. Border control capacities were further reinforced with the recruitment of personnel, further investment in technologies of surveillance and aggressive policing of borders, including through pushbacks[28]. Yet while these developments were accompanied by heightened state narratives of threat, criminalisation and border protection, they were – in terms of policy – a continuation of previous trends.

1.2.2 Policies and practices in Evros

The interplay between domestic and EU policies has shaped Evros since the 1990s. The establishment of Border Guard Departments [BGDs] in 1999 and the recruitment of border guards, a police corps founded in 1998, in 2000 reinforced policing and detention capacities in the late 1990s[29].

22   Dimitriadi 2013; Karamanidou 2021
23   ibid
24   Global Detention Project (2014) Immigration Detention in Greece https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Greece_report_April2014.pdf; Karamanidou 2021;
25   Iliadou, E. (2019). Safe Havens and Prison Islands: The Politics of Protection and Deterrence of Border Crossers on Lesvos Island. Graduate Journal of Social Science, 15(1), 62–88; Skleparis, D. (2018) 'A Europe without Walls, without Fences, without Borders': A Desecuritisation of Migration Doomed to Fail, Political Studies 66(4), 985-1001
26   Hellenic Republic (2016) Law 4375/2016 Organisation and Operation of the Asylum Service, Appeals Authority, Reception and Identification Authority and Other Provisions. https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/prosphuges-politiko-asulo/nomos-4375-2016-phek-51-a-3-4-2016.html; Leivaditi, N., Papatzani, E., Ilias, A., & Petracou, E. (2020). Refugee Protection Greece Country Report, Zenodo. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3613733
27   Refugee Support Aegean and Pro Asyl (2023) What is happening today in the refugee structures on the Aegean islands https://rsaegean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ccac-aegean-islands-greece.pdf
28   ibid
29   Hellenic Republic (1999) Presidential decree 177/1999, Increase of temporary posts of Border Guards, establishment of Border Guard Departments and amendment of provisions of decrees 310/1998 and 311/1998 https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-astynomikos-astynomia/idrysi-leitourgia-uperesion/pd-177-1999.html; Hellenic Republic (1998) Law 2622/1998 Border Guard Services - Declaration of assets of police officers and other provisions https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-astynomikos-astynomia/kat-astyn-eidikoi-frouroi-synoriakoi-fylakes/n-2622-1998.html; Eparchiakos Typos (2000) New Sleepless Guardians of our borders, 06 January (copy with author)

Detention capacity was increased by repurposing disused sites, such as agricultural warehouses and factories, which were used until the end of the decade[30]. While initially ad-hoc, the use of such spaces for detention was legalised by a 2005 law which designated them as 'Special Aliens Detention Facilities'[31]. Fylakio, the site of the current PDRC and RIC, was established as one such facility in 2007[32]. In parallel, the police acquired equipment such as patrol cars and thermovision cameras, largely through EU funding mechanisms – such as INTERREG and later the External Borders Fund [EBF][33].

The reform of migration and asylum policies in the early 2010s resulted in the further reinforcement of the Evros border. More equipment and surveillance technologies were acquired through EU funds and additional police were deployed through Operation Aspida, ongoing since 2012[34]. Detention capacity was increased further. A screening centre near the village of Poros – later to become a 'semi-official' temporary detention facility – was established in south Evros in 2011[35]. A First Reception Centre, later renamed RIC, opened next to the existing detention facility in Fylakio[36]. The latter was renamed PRDC in 2012 following a change in the legal framework[37]. Two regional asylum offices have been operating in Evros since 2013, located within the Fylakio Reception centre and in Alexandroupoli[38]. The most well-known measure of this time, however, was a wall built at a 12.5km section of the border near the villages of Kastanies and Nea Vyssa, where the boundary line does not coincide with the river Evros[39]. Unlike other measures, the wall was financed exclusively through the national budget[40].

30   It is not clear which year the last functioning 'warehouse' detention site in Evros, Peplos, closed but it was likely in 2008 or 2009.Karamanidou, L, Kasparek, B. and Campbell, S. (2021) Spaces of Detention at the Greek-Turkish Land Border, Border Criminologies https://blogs.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2021/05/spaces-detention; Iatridi, I. (2015) Technology of space and population management from the plague sanatorium to the migrant detention camp, PhD thesis, Athens National Polytechnic https://independent.academia.edu/IouliaIliadi

31   Hellenic Republic (2005) Law 3386/2005: Entry, residence and social integration of third country nationals in the Greek Territory https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/n-3386-2005.html

32   Hellenic League for Human Rights (2011) Report of the Hellenic Human Rights Association (Thessaloniki group) on the detention of immigrants without legal documents in Rhodope and Evros https://www.hlhr.gr/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/EKTHESI_NEW20101.pdf

33   Police Review (1997) Support for Border Areas, March, p. 194, https://www.policemagazine.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/%CE%95%CE%91_1997-03-0000.pdf; Police Review (1997) Modernising our Equipment, May, p. 312, https://www.policemagazine.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/%CE%95%CE%91_1997-05-0000.pdf; Hellenic Police (2012) 06-08-2012: Notice of open tender for the supply of special purpose motor vehicles, https://www.astynomia.gr/2012/08/06/06-08-2012-prokiryxi-diagonismou-anoiktis-diadikasias-gia-tin-promitheia-afto-kiniton-ochimaton-eidikis-chrisis/

34   Angeli, D., Dimitriadi, A. Triandafyllidou, A. (2014) Assessing the Cost-effectiveness of Irregular Migration Control Policies in Greece, https://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MIDAS-REPORT.pdf

35   Karamanidou, L and Kasparek, B. (2020) Hidden Infrastructures of the European Border Regime: the Poros Detention Facility in Evros, Greece, shorturl.at/dmnw0

36   AIDA (2015) What's in a name? The reality of First "Reception" at Evros, https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/eu-greece-ecre-evros.pdf

37   Global Detention Project (2014) Immigration Detention in Greece https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Greece_report_April2014.pdf

38   AIDA 2015

39   Angeli et al 2014

40   ibid

Following the border spectacle of 2020, a further set of measures fortifying the border was presented as a response to the 'crisis'. New walls were constructed in the south of the prefecture and between the villages of Nei Psathades and Kornofolia, both financed by national instruments[41]. The government showcased more equipment such as new patrol cars, a sound cannon and armoured vehicles, while more border guards were hired[42]. Yet the acquisition of new patrol cars and the hiring of border guards were part of ongoing EU-financed projects, while there is no evidence the sound cannon was ever used[43]. Further, the Fylakio RIC and PDRCs were expanded and upgraded in terms of security, now resembling a CCAC – despite not officially being designated as such[44].

1.3 Actors

1.3.1 Hellenic Police and border Guard

The Hellenic Police, including the Border Guard, are the security actors responsible for border management and migration control in Greece. They were formally designated as responsible for 'combating illegal immigration along the land borders of the Country' and preventing unauthorised entries in 1991[45]. The Border Guard, a special category of fixed-term contract police staff, was established in 1998 with the key responsibility 'to prevent the illegal entry of foreigners into the country'[46]. Key border policing duties, performed both by police and border guard officers, include patrols in the riverine military zone and the inland of the prefecture, and surveillance with technical means such as the Automated Border Surveillance System [ABSS] and portable thermovision equipment[47]. Border policing tasks also include pursuits of vehicles identified as suspicious, vehicle and ID checks on the road network and public transport and apprehensions of border crossers.[48]

The police are also responsible for the detention and initial screening of border crossers before they are transferred to the Fylakio RIC, preparing legal documentation for the prosecution of unauthorised entry, and guarding duties at the Fylakio RIC and PRDC[49].

41   Oikonomikos Tachydromos (2023) Intrakat – TERNA: The contract for the extension of the fence in Evros was signed in Feres, 31 March, https://www.ot.gr/2023/03/31/epikairothta/intrakat-terna-ypegrafi-stis-feres-i-symvasi-gia-epektasi-tou-fraxti-ston-evro https://www.ot.gr/2023/03/31/epikairothta/intrakat-terna-ypegrafi-stis-feres-i-symvasi-gia-epektasi-tou-fraxti-ston-evro; Hellenic Republic (2022) Amendment in the Parliament for the fence in Evros, 25 October, shorturl.at/hovBL
42   Gatopoulos, D. and Kantouris, C. (2021) In Post-Pandemic Europe, Migrants Will Face Digital Fortress, AP News, 31 May, https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-europe-migration-technology-health-c23251bec65ba45205a0851fab07e9b6; Karagiorgos, I. (2021) Evros: Technology in the service of border guard, Euronews, 31 May, https://gr.euronews.com/2021/05/31/evros-i-texnologia-stin-ipiresis-tis-filaksis-twn-sinoron
43   Respondent 2
44   MMA (2020) Upgrading and strengthening of the existing reception and hosting infrastructure of the Regional Services of the Reception and Identification Service in the Fylakio RIC in N. Evros, https://migration.gov.gr/anavathmisi-ypodomon-evroy/; MMA (2021) Award – Invitation to a competitive process with negotiation) of the tender for the study and execution of the project "Construction of Regional Services, structures and discrete spaces of article 8 of Law 4375/2016 on the island of Lesvos and on the island of Chios and upgrade of the existing Structure at Fylakio, Evros",
45   Hellenic Republic (1991) Law 4310/1929, On the Settlement and movement of aliens in Greece, police controls, passports and deportations http://labdipol.uoc.gr/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/1.-%CE%9D.-4310_1929.pdf.
46   Hellenic Republic 1998
47   MCP (2016) Decision to grant the Action "Strengthening Police Services with Police Officers Personnel (Operation ASPIDA)" https://www.minocp.gov.gr/images/stories/2016/prokirikseis16/04082016epixeirhshaspida.pdf
48   ibid
49   AIDA 2015; AIDA (2023) Country Report Greece https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece/; Hellenic Republic 2005

1.3.2 The military

With the designation of the police as responsible for migration control in 1991, the role of the military in border control has been seen as 'assistive'[50]. In practice, the main task of the military has been informing the police of detections and apprehensions of PoM[51]. However, soon after the election of New Democracy administration in 2019, the military was accorded responsibilities for coordinating and overseeing border and migration management at the national level. A National Coordinator role and an Integrated Border Surveillance Authority (ENFES) responsible for 'the control and surveillance of the land and sea borders of the Greek Territory' were established under the Ministry of National Defence[52]. Soon after, the police and army started joint patrols at the Evros border[53]. During the events of March 2020, the military was fully involved in border control activities, such as patrols and checks on main roads[54]. Joint patrols continued after March 2020, although the role of national coordinator and the Integrated Border Surveillance Authority were abolished and their functions reintegrated into civilian structures in July 2022[55].

1.3.3 EU Actors

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, has been involved in policing the Evros border since 2007. Between 2007 and 2010, support to the Greek authorities was provided under the land border component of Joint Operation Poseidon[56]. In 2010, Frontex launched a Rapid Border Intervention operation — the first in its history – after the Greek government requested assistance due to rising border crossings in the area[57]. Since its completion in March 2011, Frontex maintained a presence in Evros through various operations, most recently Terra[58]. A second Rapid Border Intervention, between 11 March and 31 October 2020, was launched as a result of the events from February to March 2020[59].

Frontex teams work alongside Greek police officers in most of the tasks outlined in section 1.3.1 as well as in conducting debriefing interviews, where Frontex officers collect in-

50   Hellenic Parliament (2011) Session 54, 14 January, https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/a08fc2dd-61a9-4a83-b09a-09f4c564609d/es20110114.pdf
51   Soufli BCD patrol shift reports 2010-2014; Interview with police director 2018
52   Law 4650/2019 Regulations of the Ministry of National Defence and other provisions, https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-enoples-dynameis/nomos-4650-2019-phek-207a-17-12-2019.html
53   To Ethnos (2021, 20 December) Evros: Increased patrols and barbed wire to reduce refugee flows, https://www.ethnos.gr/greece/article/78538/ebrosenisxymenesperipolieskaisyrmatoplegmatagianameiothoynoiprosfygikesroes
54   HumanRights360 2020; Ta Nea (2020, 03 April) This is how the Armed Forces prevented the entry of thousands of immigrants to Evros, https://www.tanea.gr/2020/04/03/greece/geetha-etsi-apetrepsan-oi-enoples-dynameis-tin-eisodo-xiliadon-metanaston-ston-evro/
55   Hellenic Republic (2022) Law 4960/2022, National Custodial System and Framework for Hosting Unaccompanied Minors and other provisions https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/nomos-4960-2022-phek-145a-22-7-2022.html
56   Frontex (2008) General Report 2007 https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Key_Documents/Annual_report/2007/frontex_general_report_2007_final.pdf; Frontex (2010) General Report 2009 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201008/20100805ATT79751/20100805ATT79751EN.pdf
57   In.gr (2010) C. Papoutsis asks the EU to develop FRONTEX in Evros as well, 24 October, https://www.in.gr/2010/10/24/greece/anaptyksi-tis-frontex-kai-ston-ebro-zita-apo-tin-ee-o-xr-papoytsis/; Frontex (2011) RABIT Operation 2010 Evaluation Report, copy with the author
58   Frontex (2022) Joint Operation Terra 2022 https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/multimedia/videos/joint-operation-terra-2022-rasCUq; Karamanidou, L. and Kasparek, B. (2020) Fundamental Rights, Accountability and Transparency in European Governance of Migration: The Case of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency
59   Frontex (2021) Frontex Evaluation Report – Rapid Border Intervention Evros 2020, https://aleph.occrp.org/entities/82906027.d175b59b0df2c7df62e91b9e3c32656707857366

formation for risk analysis from border crossers[60]. Nevertheless, a recurrent theme since 2018 has been the erratic participation of Frontex staff in patrols in the riverine area, attributed to the decisions of the local police forces[61]. Similarly, Fundamental Rights Monitors [FRMs] are not normally granted access by the Greek authorities to observe operations in the riverine area, although on one occasion FRMs were permitted access to the vicinity of the wall[62].

The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, formerly EASO) had personnel based in Fylakio, assisting with reception and identification procedures and asylum applications, between 2019 and 2021[63]. Under the 2022-2024 action plan, EUAA was to continue supporting Greek authorities, but support started to be phased out due to low arrivals in 2023[64].

1.3.4 International Organizations

According to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum [MMA], UNHCR has a representative in Fylakio RIC to inform third country nationals 'on issues of international, European and Greek law'[65]. The International Organisation for Migration [IOM] provides information about the 'solution' of voluntary return[66]. Both organisations provide child protection services for unaccompanied minors (UAMs)[67].

60   Frontex (2021) FRO Mission Report-Evros, https://aleph.occrp.org/entities/82906404.0bd2a7270e9414c34fef5a80e3675214d35e38f3; Frontex (2021); Soufli BGD patrol shift reports, 2010-2014 (seen by the author in the Alexandroupoli office of the General Archives of the State between 23/12/2022 and 13/01/2023)

61   Karamanidou and Kasparek 2020; Frontex (2019) Mission Report – Evros, https://aleph.occrp.org/entities/68569531.801abcca1b-44ca7d81b230f9b4a18a2fc431cacd; Frontex; Frontex 2011; Frontex (2023) Mission Report, monitoring Mission to JO Terra, Alexandroupolis, Orestiada, 26 June -07 July https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/

62   Frontex (2023) Mission Report, monitoring Mission to JO Terra, Alexandroupolis, Orestiada, 28 August - 8 September, https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/ Frontex (2023) Mission Report, monitoring Mission to JO Terra, Alexandroupolis, Orestiada, 20-31 March https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/; Frontex 2021 FROM report

63   EUAA (2022) Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2021 https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2022-06/CAAR_2021_adopted_by_MB_22062022.pdf; ECRE (2019) The Role of EASO Operations in National Asylum Systems https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/EASO-Operations_Report.pdf

64   EUAA (2023) EUAA and Greece consolidate progress on asylum and reception, as phasing out of support begins, https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/euaa-and-greece-consolidate-progress-asylum-and-reception-phasing-out-support-begins

65   MMA (2023) Fylakio Reception and Identification Centre https://web.archive.org/web/20231202221327/https://migration.gov.gr/ris/perifereiakes-monades/kyt-domes/k-y-t-orestiadas/

66   ibid

67   UNHCR (2023) Hope far from home: Honoring World Refugee Day in Greece https://www.unhcr.org/gr/33905-pagosmia-imera-prosfygon-2023.html; UNHCR (2024) Child Protection Sub-Working Group Meeting Minutes (30.01.2024) https://data.unhcr.org/en/working-group/12?sv=11&geo=5179

1.4 Human rights violations and border violence

Violations of the human rights of PoM and border violence have been documented in Greece for decades, including in the region of Evros[68]. Over 600 deaths, predominantly of adult men, have been recorded at the Evros border since 2000[69].

Pushbacks – illegal returns across an international border which violate the principle of non-refoulement – have been a systemic and normalised practice, dating as far back as the 1980s[70]. Although constant as a practice, they appear to have intensified since 2017, mirroring the displacement of crossings from the islands to Evros because of the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement[71]. Further intensification has been observed since the border spectacle of 2020, during which pushbacks were widely reported[72]. Pushbacks generally involve the illegal detention of border crossers before transportation to the river and to Turkey, frequently accompanied by physical and verbal violence and sometimes conducted by PoM coerced into 'service' by the Greek authorities[73]. Some strandings on islets since 2022 involving PoM were a result of pushbacks[74].

Physical, sexual and verbal violence against PoM has been documented consistently over decades during pushbacks but also during apprehension and detention, and has often been serious enough to amount to torture[75]. Reported practices have included beatings, kickings, forced stripping and body searches, sexual assaults, rapes and use of racialised slurs[76]. Other degrading practices documented over time involve the deprivation of food, water and access to sanitary facilities[77]. Another form of violence involves the destruction or theft of personal items such as documents, clothes, backpacks, money and mobile phones[78].

68   For example Eparchiakos Typos [ET] (1997) Informal deportations of refugees continue, 9 November; AI (2014) Frontier of Hope and Fear https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/greece_0.pdf; AI (2021) Greece: Violence, Lies and Pushbacks, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/4307/2021/en/; Human Rights Watch [HRW] (2008) Stuck in a Revolving Door: Iraqis and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants at the Greece/Turkey Entrance to the European Union, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/greeceturkey1108web_0.pdf; Committee for the Prevention of Torture [CPT] (2020) Report to the Greek Government on the Visit to Greece Carried Out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 13 to 17 March 2020 https://rm.coe.int/1680a06a86; Pro Asyl (2013) Pushed Back: systematic human rights violations against refugees in the Aegean sea and at the Greek-Turkish land border, https://www.proasyl.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/proasyl_pushed_back_24.01.14_a4.pdf
69   McGregor, M (2023) At the Evros border, the bodies mount up, https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/48783/at-the-evros-border-the-bodies-mount-up
70   ET 1997; Kokkinidis, T. (2009) The Dark Secrets of Evros, Athens Indymedia, 24 October,https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1096124; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2022
71   ARSIS, Greek Council for Refugees and HumanRights360 (2018) The New Normality: Continuous Push-Backs of Third Country Nationals on the Evros River, shorturl.at/irKQ1; Koros, D. (2020) The Normalization of Pushbacks in Greece: Biopolitics and Racist State Crime, State Crime Journal, 10(2): 238-256
72   AI 2020; Refugee Rights Europe (2021) Pushbacks and Rights Violations at Europe's Borders: The State of Play in 2020, https://refugee-rights.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/pushbacks-and-rights-violations-at-europes-borders.pdf
73   Arsis et al 2018; AI 2021; BVMN (2022) The Black Book of Pushbacks,https://borderviolence.eu/black-book-of-pushbacks-2022/; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2022; GNCHR (2023) Recording Mechanism of Incidents of Illegal Forced Returns: Annual report, https://nchr.gr/images/pdf/RecMechanism/Annual_Report_2022_compressed_1.pdf
74   BVMN 2022 islets; GCR 2023; https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1424110649496543235
75   ARSIS et al 2018; BVMN 2022; GCR 2023; HRW 2008; Mobile Info Team [MIT] (2019) Illegal Pushbacks in Evros, https://www.mobileinfoteam.org/pushbacks
76   ibid; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2022
77   ibid
78   ibid; Malichudis, S. and Mourenza, A. (2023) The great robbery, https://wearesolomon.com/mag/format/investigation/the-great-robbery-during-illegal-pushbacks-in-greece-refugees-are-robbed-by-border-guards/

Practices and conditions of detention have also entailed systematic human rights violations. Detention, whether people claim asylum or not, has been a blanket and often arbitrary practice even when a person cannot be deported or has applied for asylum[79]. Inhumane detention conditions in BGDs and the Fylakio RIC and PDRC have been consistently documented since the 1990s, and have included lack of natural light, ventilation and heating, inadequate sanitation practices and facilities, bedding, provision of food and overcrowding[80].

Although issues around access to asylum have improved since previous decades, pushbacks continue to constitute a major obstacle to accessing protection[81]. In March 2020, reception and asylum procedures were suspended for a month in response to the events of that period in contravention of international law[82].

Compared with other locations in Greece, the presence of NGOs active in supporting PoM in Evros is limited. As well as running facilities for unaccompanied minors in Alexandroupoli, Arsis provides educational, legal, psychosocial and material (e.g. clothes, medicines) support to UAMs at Fylakio RIC, including UAM support services in collaboration with IOM[83]. Metadrasi provides interpretation services and support to UAMs, as well as implementing a guardianship project with NGO Praxis[84]. HumanRights360 provides social support services to both UAMs and adult PoM[85]. HumanRights360 was also the only NGO with a local presence that ran a border monitoring programme. However, the programme was discontinued after the government targeted the NGO following its involvement in a controversial islet stranding case which resulted in its criminalisation by the government and media[86].

79   AI (2010) Greece: Irregular Migrants and Asylum Seekers Routinely Detained in Substandard Conditions, https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/amnesty/2010/en/74682; ProAsyl Walls of Shame: Accounts from the Inside. The Detention Centres of Evros, https://www.proasyl.de/material/walls-of-shame-accounts-from-the-inside-the-detention-centres-of-evros; RSA Aegean (2024) Immigration detention in Greece in 2023, https://rsaegean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024-05_RSA_Detention2023_EN.pdf

80   Arsis et al 2018; AI (2005) Out of the Spotlight: The Rights of Foreigners and Minorities Are Still a Grey Area, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur25/016/2005/en; CPT (2001) Report to the Government of Greece on the visit to Greece, 26 October to 2 November 1999, https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/greece; CPT 2020; Pro Asyl 2012; BVMN (2023) Dark Rooms, Degrading Treatment and Denial: The Use of Violence in Greece's Pre-Removal Detention Centres, https://borderviolence.eu/app/uploads/Violence-Report-BVMN.pdf;; MIT 2019; Alarmphone (2020) Footage from Tychero Border Guard Station before illegal pushback 12.11.2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifTFmR5N9q0&ab_channel=AlarmPhone

81   Pro Asyl 2013; Karamanidou, L and Schuster, L. (2012) Realizing One's Rights under the 1951 Convention 60 Years On: A Review of Practical Constraints on Accessing Protection in Europe, Journal of Refugee Studies, 25 (2) 169–192

82   HR360 2020; AI 2020

83   UNHCR 2024; Arsis (2023) "Grant Arsis Social Youth Support Organisation for the implementation of the "METOIKOS" project https://arsis.gr/domes-filoxenias/; Arsis (2023, 17 November) Educational Intervention Team of ARSIS at the Reception and Identification Center (RIC) in Fylakio, Evros . https://arsis.gr/omada-ekpaideutikis-parembasis-evros/; Arsis (2023b, 18 September) Distribution of goods to unaccompanied minors residing in the Fylaki Prison in Evros https://arsis.gr/arsis-evros-kyt-iom/

84   MMA (2023) 1st Group A Executive Contract of the Framework Agreement Contract No 04/2022 for the "Provision of Interpretation, Tele-interpretation, Translation and related services to meet the operational needs of the Agency Reception and Identification Service, the Asylum Service, the Specialised Service for Reception and the Special Secretariat for the Protection of Unaccompanied Minors and the Appeals Authority of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum https://cerpp.eprocurement.gov.gr/upgkimdis/unprotected/home.xhtml;

85   HumanRights360 (2023) Reception Procedures, Registration and Monitoring of Return Procedures in Evros https://www.humanrights360.org/el/diadikasies-ypodochis-katagrafis-kai-parakolouthisi-diadikasion-epistrofis-ston-evro/

86 HumanRights360 (2023) Monitoring, Recording, and Addressing the Illegal Practices at the land Border of Evros https://www.humanrights360.org/monitoring-recording-and-addressing-the-illegal-practices-at-the-land-borders-of-evros/; MMA (2023) Mitarakis: "NGOs should clarify what they had to do with the fake news about "little Maria"" https://migration.gov.gr/mitarakis-na-xekatharisoyn-oi-mko-ti-schesi-eichan-me-ta-fake-news-gia-ti-mikri-maria/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=mitarakis-na-xekatharisoyn-oi-mko-ti-schesi-eichan-me-ta-fake-news-gia-ti-mikri-maria ; Aggelidis, D. (2022) Clarifications from HumanRights360 on publications about the Vourliotis findings, https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiomata/369014_dieykriniseis-apo-ti-humanrights360-gia-dimosieymata-shetika-me-porisma

The Greek Council of Refugees [GCR] provides legal assistance, including through two locally-based lawyers[87].

Small, self-organised grassroots groups in the main urban areas focus predominantly on raising awareness[88]. Solidarity initiatives and activism were more prominent prior to 2015 but appear to have declined in the highly securitised and militarised environment of Evros[89].

1.5 Overview of developments in border surveillance and control technologies

The Hellenic Police has been using border surveillance technologies in Evros since the early 2000s, making them an early adopter of technological 'solutions' to border control. Thermovision cameras, for example, were acquired in 1997 through funding from the INTERREG project, and were in use in the early 2000s[90]. Technological capacity has expanded significantly since the early 2010s, aided by EU funding schemes such as EBF, ISF and currently BMVI. It included the installation of Automated Border Surveillance Systems (ABSS) in North and South Evros and investment on equipment such as thermovision vans, cameras and binoculars[91].

In addition, both nationally and locally, Greek authorities established structures aimed at aligning Greek policies and practices with EU emerging frameworks for managing borders and instruments such as EUROSUR. A National Coordination Centre was established in 2012 and reformed in 2014, in order to coordinate operational activities, facilitate cooperation and information sharing with EU institutions and oversee the implementation of national and EU measures concerning border management[92]. A local Operational Centre for Border Surveillance was established in the village of Nea Vyssa in 2012 in order to manage the information received from the newly established ABSS[93].

87   Interview 2
88   Interview 6
89   Kaşlı, Z. (2017) (Re)bordering Territory and Citizenship on the Greek-Turkish Borderland, PhD Thesis, https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/items/d0487857-a4ea-4a6f-9cc6-ff776f8ffd2a
90   Police review (1997) Support for Border Areas, March, p. 194, https://www.policemagazine.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/%CE%95%CE%91_1997-03-0000.pdf; Modernising our Equipment, May, p. 312, https://www.policemagazine.gr/sites/default/files/pdf/%CE%95%CE%91_1997-05-0000.pdf;
Archives of the First Instance Court of Alexandroupoli, seen at the Alexandroupoli office of the General Archives of the State in April 2023. The information derives from descriptions of activities by police officers testifying in hearings concerning illegal entry and facilitation charges between 2001 and 2006.
91   MCP (2011) Absorption of European External Borders Funds, https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/7464755.pdf; European Migration Network [EMN] (2012) Annual Policy Report 2011, http://emn.immigration.gov.gr/en/repository/send/20-2011/27-gr-20120426-apr2011-en-version-final-en
92   Fotiadis, A. (2015) Merchants of Borders, Athens: Potamos;
Law 4058/2012 Provision of security services by armed guards on commercial ships and other provisions, shorturl.at/pwQ17. Law 4249/2014. The centre was also renamed into 'National Coordination Center for Border Control, Immigration and Asylum; MCP (2014) 06-04-2014: The presentation of the Center for Integrated Border Management & Immigration (K.O.D.I.S.ME.) took place in the presence of the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, shorturl.at/dfoK3
93   EMN (2013) Greece: Annual Policy Report 2012 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259068043_Etesia_Ekthese_gia_te_Metanasteuse_kai_to_Asylo_2012_-_Ellada_-_EMN; MCP (2011) Christos Papoutsis, Minister of Citizen Protection and the Deputy Minister, Manolis Othonas, inaugurated the Border Surveillance Operations Centre, 6 February, http://www.cpapoutsis.gr/Document.aspx?ID=2148

Regional centres for Integrated Border and Migration were established in Alexandroupoli and Orestiada[94]. They were co-funded by European Union mechanisms, such as the External Border Fund and later the Internal Security Fund [ISF][95].

The technological reinforcement of the border continued in the following years, with the extension of the ABSS towards south Evros, and investment in all kinds of surveillance and detection equipment (see section 3.1). Such projects were co-funded primarily by the ISF programme. However, national budgets and other funding schemes —such as the Recovery and Resilience programme, which contributed to the funding of the Hyperion and Centaur projects (see section 3.1.5). Under the 2021-2027 funding cycle, Greece is to receive over one billion Euros through the BMVI instrument, as well as through other EU funding programmes[96].

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94   MCP (2014) 06-04-2014: The presentation of the Center for Integrated Border Management & Immigration (K.O.D.I.S.ME.) took place in the presence of the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection https://www.minocp.gov.gr/2014/06/04/04-06-2014-parousia-tou-ypourgou-dimosias-taxis-kai-prostasias-tou-politi-pragmatopoiithike-i-parousiasi-tou-kentrou-olokliromenis-diacheirisis-synoron-metanastefsis-k-o-di-s-me/
95   Fotiadis 2015
96   PICUM and ECRE (2024) Beyond walls and fences: EU funding used for a complex and digitalised border surveillance system https://picum.org/blog/new-research-finds-that-eu-funds-digital-walls-and-police-dogs-at-the-eus-borders/

2. Methodology

2.1 Research & data gathering methods

The report draws on both primary and secondary data. Information on border surveillance technologies and databases was collected primarily through desk research. Official documentation on calls for tender and public contracts were sourced at di-avgeia.gov.gr, the public administration database in Greece, the Central Electronic Registry for Public Contracts (https://cerpp.eprocurement.gov.gr) and the procurement pages of various ministries. Documents from these sources were key for determining what technologies exist at the Evros border and occasionally information about the design and capabilities of the technologies used. The documents were read through in order to locate information relevant to the report. Additional information was drawn from a range of other sources, such as ministry media pages, private company websites, EU-funded project websites and mainly Greek digital media and television. A further secondary source was testimonies on pushbacks at the Evros border, gathered by BVMN between 2019 and 2023. Additional material on EU-funded research projects, as well as relevant documents on Evros was collected through freedom of information application to the Commission, the Research Executive Agency and Frontex. The contextual sections draw primarily on research literature and other secondary sources, as well as previous research conducted with archival sources in Evros.

The author also conducted five interviews with four NGO representatives, a journalist and three with self-organised groups in Athens and Evros active in solidarity with PoM or on surveillance technologies. A list of participants is provided below. Due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic in Greece, the names and locations of the groups are not provided to prevent identification. No interviews were conducted with PoM. While some information might have been gained in this manner, this would have probably not outweighed the risk of re-traumatisation given that crossings through Evros often entail violent experiences.

A field assessment in Evros was conducted in late April and early May 2024. Its aim was to visually verify some of the technologies identified through desk research by observing the locality, including the Delta of the river Evros, and observe any changes in border surveillance infrastructure since previous field observations conducted by the researcer.

Table 3: Interview respondents

Respondent 1	NGO
Respondent 2	NGO
Respondent 3	Self-organised group
Respondent 4	Self-organised group
Respondent 5	Journalist
Respondent 6	Self-organised group
Respondent 7	NGO
Respondent 8	NGO

2.2 Limitations of the study

There is little existing research or reports on the surveillance technologies used at the Evros border or data gathering, databases and their use. While official documentation has proven an excellent source of information on border surveillance technology in Evros, there is a level of secrecy concerning technologies utilised by the military. Certain calls for tender and contracts have been made confidential by the Greek authorities. Further, the European Commission and the Research Executive Agency (REA) refused to disclose documents related to both past and current research projects, citing security and the protection of commercial interests.

Evros is a heavily militarised and policed border, and the riverine area is a military zone where access is generally forbidden to civilians. This limits the possibility for visually observing and verifying technologies such as the cameras of the North Evros ABSS or some of the pylons of the South Evros ABSS.

Overall, a strategy of drawing on multiple open sources, while laborious and time-consuming, was helpful in overcoming some of the secrecy surrounding border surveillance technologies. However, practices of secrecy and lack of transparency remain an obstacle. A further challenge was to determine the actual presence, use and capabilities of border surveillance technologies against techno-solutionist narratives. State authorities tend to represent border technologies as both crucial and effective in strengthening their capacity for controlling the border — a narrative often uncritically adopted by the media. Yet despite the early use of border surveillance and control technologies, Evros remains a key route into the European Union to the present.

3. Border technologies in Evros

3.1 Border Surveillance and Control Technologies in the Evros region

3.1.1 Automated Border Surveillance Systems

The North Evros ABSS

The North Evros ABSS comprises of thermovision and day cameras mounted on pylons. 13 of the pylons are located along the Kastanies – Nea Vyssa wall, one near the village of Marasia, and at least two on the stretch of the river from the eastern end of the wall southwards at the level of village of Neo Chemonio[97]. In addition, the system includes seven CCTV security cameras whose main function is to monitor the areas near the pylons[98]. The system is configured to detect movement in the pre-frontier area, the Turkish side of the border[99]. Specifications of some of the brands of day and thermovision cameras identified[100] in procurement documents suggest detection ranges between 2.2km and 12.7km for people and 13.2km and 18.8km for vehicles[101].

As the entire system is located within the military zone, the exact placement of each pylon is difficult to determine. The positions of some pylons were confirmed by comparing satellite images of the area before and after 2012 as well as open sources, including the website of research project EWISA[102].

Images and other data from the system are transmitted to the Border Surveillance Operational Centre in the village of Nea Vyssa, which was inaugurated in 2012[103]. Images produced by the system can be seen in various Greek media[104].

The system and subsequent repairs and maintenance were co-financed by EU schemes – EBF, ISF and BMVI[105].

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97   Thrakinet (2012, 7 February) This is the "Border Surveillance Operations Center" in Evros, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Upxy6-goNHY&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.onalert.gr%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjY&feature=emb_logo; MCP (2015) Re-issue of the proposed tender competition for the hardware and software maintenance of the automated border surveillance system of Orestiada Police Department https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A9%CE%99%CE%9F%CE%A0465%CE%A6%CE%98%CE%95-62%CE%9F; MCP (2016) Repair and Maintenance works of the Automated Land and river Border Surveillance System https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/6%CE%98%CE%943465%CE%A6%CE%98%CE%95-%CE%A7%CE%979; MCP (2022) Notice of an open tender for the provision of services for the maintenance of the existing border surveillance system of the Police Directorate of Orestiada https://www.astynomia.gr/file/2022/02/03022022diak.pdf

98   Thrakinet 2012; MCP 2015

99   To Ethnos (2020, 29 May) Evros operational center - Inside the watchful "eye" of the border https://www.ethnos.gr/greece/article/108103/epixeirhsiakokentroebroymesastoagrypnomatitonsynoron

100   OPGAL Accuracii XR, XRU, AC225Z17VPAP01, Accuracii AC420Z15VPAP03; FLIR PTZ35X140MS Dual Sensor

101   MCP 2016 Repair; MCP 2022 notice; MCP (2018) ANNOUNCEMENT OF COMPETITION Automated Surveillance System Maintenance https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/680%CE%99465%CE%A7%CE%987-%CE%98%CE%A6%CE%9A; Flir (2008) PTZ-35x140 MS / SR-35x140 MS https://www.sourcesecurity.com/datasheets/flir-systems-ptz-35x140-ms/co-2752-ga/SS_0005_EN.pdf
Vumii (2014) Accuracii™ XR https://www.winncom.com/pdf/Vumii_Accuracii_XR/Vumii_Accuracii_XR_Brochure.pdf; Vumii (2016) Accuracii™ XRU https://komtek2006.com/images/pdf/Accuracii-XRU-HD.pdf

102   Thrakinet 2012; MCP 2015

103   EMN 2013

104   Thrakinet 2012; To Ethnos 2020; Souliotis, Y. (2020, 10 May), The surveillance headquarters in Evros, I Kathimerini https://www.kathimerini.gr/investigations/1077525/to-stratigeio-epitirisis-ston-evro/; Souliotis, Y. (2020, 10 May) Evros: in the forbidden zone https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5egIsXpJ6e4

105   Hellenic Police 2012, 2015

The ABSS extension

The expansion of the ABSS became operational in November 2021, with considerable delay since it was tendered in 2016. The system was designed to improve situational awareness in the context of EUROSUR following recommendations by the European Commission[106]. It includes ten pylons near the borderline – from the village of Sofiko to the delta of river Evros – on which ground surveillance radars, laser distance measurers and day and thermal cameras are mounted[107]. An additional eleventh pylon is an 'auxiliary telecommunications interconnection point' which facilitates the transmission of data between pylons and operational centres. In addition to the surveillance equipment, the system comprises telecommunication infrastructures, CCTV cameras to monitor the areas of the pylons, energy-supply systems, and software systems linking local, regional and national operational centres[108]. The system produces situational images of the border area up to 15 kilometres into Turkish territory[109]. Day and thermal cameras are remotely operated though PCs and joysticks by staff of the local operational centres[110].

The images and other data are first transmitted to four local operational centres in the BGDs in Feres, Tychero, Soufli and the police training facility in Didymoteicho. The system automatically produces alerts when it detects 'targets' – people or vehicles – on the basis of which operators create 'incidents' which require action by the police and border guard. Incidents are classified by operators as of high, medium and low risk[111]. Images (such as the full movements of a 'target') recorded by the surveillance devices as well as the CCTV cameras are stored for seven days. Other data, including on detected 'targets,' is saved for six months[112].

Data is further shared with two regional operational centres located in the Neo Cheimonio BGD and Alexandroupoli Airport, as well as the National Coordinating Centre in Athens[113]. While the reception of situational images and alerts by the four local operational centres is geared towards local border control actions, the regional operational centres and the NCC are also responsible for data analysis [114]. Situational data is not shared with Frontex 'directly', at local operational level, but via the National Coordinating Centre in Athens in line with the EUROSUR framework[115].

A full map of the system, based on official documents and fieldwork, is provided below. While some of the pylons, of height between 10 and 30 metres, are close to the river, others such as those near Soufli, and the villages of Kissari, Lagyna and Petrades are visible from the main roads in the area.

106   European Commission (2014) Commission Staff Working Document on the Assessment of the implementation of the Greek Action Plan on Asylum and Migration management, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14027-2014-INIT/en/pdf

107   MIAR (2016) Call no. 28/2016 "Extension of the automated surveillance system in the riverside part of the Greek-Turkish border in the Evros region", https://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories/2016/prokirikseis16/16122016-diakir.pdf; MIAR (2016) Decision to grant the action 'Extension of the automated system surveillance in the riparian part of the Greek-Turkish border, https://www.minocp.gov.gr/images/stories/2016/prokirikseis16/03052016-apofaseis_bv4.pdf

108   MIAR 2016

109   ibid

110   ibid

111   ibid

112   ibid, p.101

113   ibid; MIAR 2016 decision

114   ibid

115   Emmanouilidou, L. and Schmitz, F. (2022) Is Greece failing to use EU-funded border surveillance? DW, https://www.dw.com/en/is-greece-failing-to-deploy-eu-funded-surveillance-system-at-turkish-border-as-intended/a-63055306

Figure 1 : Map of the ABSS system in the Alexandroupoli Police Directorate

Figure 2 : Map of the ABSS system in the Orestiada Police Directorate

Figure 3: Pylon OS7, near Kissario village

Figure 4: Pylon OS8, near Soufli

Photo: LK, 2022

The surveillance subsystem at the Delta of river Evros

An additional surveillance subsystem appears to operate in the area of the Delta of the Evros[116]. Unlike the other two systems, it comprises equipment provided by two EU-funded research projects, ANDROMEDA and NESTOR. During the trial of the ANDROMEDA project, a pylon equipped with a thermovision camera, AIS sensor and marine radar was constructed at a building known as the 'Forest Hut' (Δασικό Περίπτερο - Dasiko Periptero), used by the Hellenic Police[117]. Based on information visible on the monitors shown in a TV programme, the sub-system also includes an INUS drone system, a patrol boat equipped with a thermovision camera and radars, and ENGAGE BME command and control software, all of which can be traced back to the ANDROMEDA project[118]. Figure 5, taken in April 2024, shows that the pylon constructed by the Andromeda project is still on location. system, a patrol boat equipped with a thermovision camera and radars, and ENGAGE BME command and control software, all of which can be traced back to the AN-DROMEDA project. Figure 5, taken in April 2024, shows that the pylon constructed by the Andromeda project is still on location.

A smaller pylon with a MILTECH thermovision camera was provided by the EU-funded project NESTOR[119]. MILTECH, a Greek defence company, was one of the NESTOR partners[120]. The white disk protruding from the tall part of the building, visible in Figure 5 , is likely an Automatic Direction-Finding Antenna (ADFA), part of an Radio Frequency localisation system tested during the NESTOR trial in March 2023[121]. The antenna, along with the SignalShark system, were developed by German company Narda Safety Test Solutions, a partner in the NESTOR project[122]. Visual material collected during the field assessment of the area confirms that the NESTOR equipment is still in place, suggesting the possibility that it is used by the Hellenic Police similarly to that installed by the ANDROMEDA project.

116   Alpha (2022, 27 October) Αυτοψία: Αυτοψία στον Έβρο https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_cAjhbTod8;
117   MCP (2022) Direct assignment decision for the supply of 80 m3 of firewood, oak quality, for the heating needs of the Forestry Building in the Evros Delta of Feres BGD during the winter season of the year 2022 https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/68%CE%A9%CE%9846%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%9565
118   Alpha 2022; Maltezos et al (2021) The INUS Platform: A Modular Solution for Object Detection and Tracking from UAVs and Terrestrial Surveillance Assets, Computation 2021, 9(2) 1-34 https://www.mdpi.com/2079-3197/9/2/12; Andromeda (2021) The ANDROMEDA project, 20 – 21 May 2021 Frontex Workshop https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/EUresearchprojects/News/ANDROMEDA.pdf
119   NESTOR (2023) NESTOR H2020 Project final video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-PRARCIOxI&ab_channel=NestorProjectH2020
120   European Commission (2024) aN Enhanced pre-frontier intelligence picture to Safeguard The EurOpean boRders, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101021851
121   The specific antenna, in the same building, features in the company's promotional material: Narda Safety Test Solutions (2023) Border surveillance to protect against illegal migration and trafficking, https://www.narda-sts.com/en/newsblog/border-surveillance-to-protect-against-illegal-migration-and-human-trafficking/; Nestor 2023, ibid
122   ibid

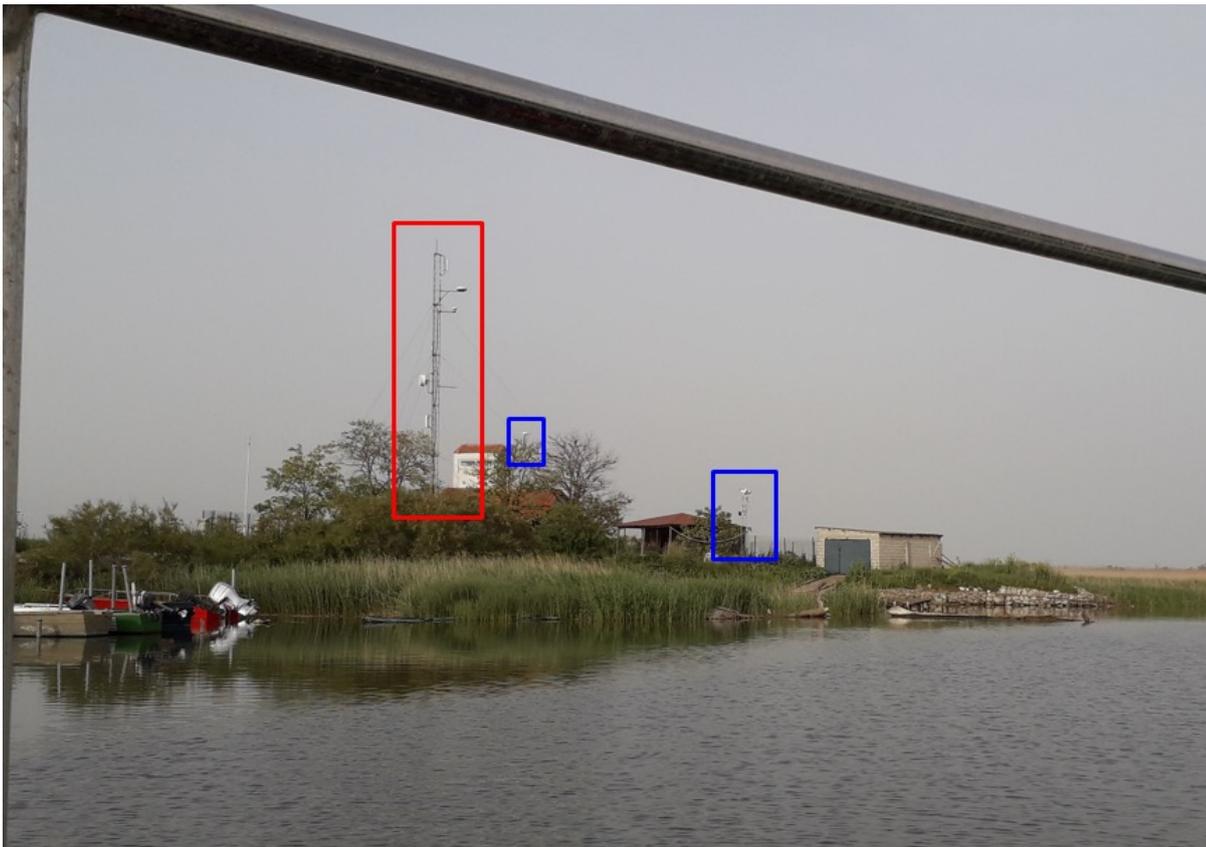**Figure 5: The surveillance sub-system at the Dasiko Periptero, Delta of river Evros**

Photo shows the ANDROMEDA project pylon (red) and the Nestor project pylon and ADFA antenna (blue).

Photo: LK, April 2022

3.1.2 Non-fixed surveillance technologies

Portable thermovision cameras and binoculars

Portable thermovision cameras and binoculars were first procured in 1997, funded through the INTERREG project and their use is evidenced since the early 2000s[123]. They are used for observation of the border from elevated ground, such as hilltops[124]. Portable cameras and binoculars were not necessarily connected to the centralised command and control platforms supporting ABSS, although more modern equipment offers such capacities[125]. A Pulsar Accolade portable device is shown to be connected to the Engage BME BC3i[126] platform, developed by the ANDROMEDA project[127].

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123   Police Review 1997; Archives of the First Instance Court of Alexandroupoli
124   Archives of the Soufli Border Guard Department, seen at the General Archives of the State, Alexandroupoli; Alpha 2022
125   Alpha 2022; NESTOR 2023
126   Command, Control and Communication system
127   Alpha 2022

Thermovision cameras and binoculars have been acquired and maintained through both national and EU budgets – previously INTERREG and EBF, more recently ISF and BMVI[128]. Since 2020, the police directorates of Alexandroupoli and Orestiada have acquired at least 19 thermovision cameras, while a further 2 were donated to Orestiada PD[129]. In addition, the Hellenic police acquired 56 binoculars through a national emergency action in 2020 triggered by the events of February and March 2020[130]. A further 100 monoculars were purchased in 2022, this time from an EU emergency funding scheme[131]. It is unclear what proportion of the equipment would be deployed in Evros as the actions were nation-wide. Evidence, however, suggests that police directorates possess and use a considerable number of such equipment[132]. Frontex also provides equipment such as thermovision binoculars[133]. A further 440 thermal cameras are to be acquired for BGDs nationwide under the 2021-2027 BMVI funds[134].

Testimonies of PoM collected by BVMN mention the use of binoculars for detection as well as for checking on the Turkish side of the border before pushbacks[135].

128   Police Review 1997; MCP (2011) 16-12-2011: Notice of open tender for the supply of binoculars (night observation monoculars) https://www.astynomia.gr/2011/12/16/16-12-2011prokiryxi-anoichtou-diagonismou-gia-tin-promitheia-dioptron-nychterinis-paratirisis-monoky-alon; MMA (2024) 8th Clarification of Migration and Internal Affairs Fund Programs (FUND) Program Period 2021 – 2027, https://tamey.gov.gr/exeidikefsi-programmaton/

129   MCP (2023) Award of the procurement of the items of the Orestiada Police Directorate No. 8028/52/64-f from 11-10-2023 Call for Expression of Interest https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/9%CE%A8%CE%A3146%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-9%CE%A6%CE%9F; MCP (2020) Establishment of a Committee, for the receipt, of one (1) thermal camera PULSAR XP-50 of the Union of Rotary Clubs 2470-District of Rotary International, at the Police Department of Orestiada https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%9F%CE%A3%CE%9C46%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%A5%CE%A69; MCP (2020) Establishment of a Committee, for the receipt of one (1) thermal imaging camera of the EL.AS Friends Group - Western Attica, for the needs of the Orestiada Police Department https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%A9%CE%93146%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%A8%CE%9A%CE%A6; MCP (2021) Direct assignment of the supply of eight (8) non-cooled medium-range thermal imaging cameras - light, to meet the needs of the Jurisdiction Services of the Alexandroupoli Police Department; https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/67%CE%A7%CE%A946%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%9B95; MCP (2023) Award of the procurement of the items of the Orestiada Police Directorate No. 8028/52/64-f from 11-10-2023 Call for Expression of Interest https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/9%CE%A8%CE%A3146%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-9%CE%A6%CE%9F

130   MCP (2020) Award of supply contract "ten (10) thermal imaging cameras (medium range) type MLT-IRB-75A", https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%962646%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-00%CE%9D; MCP (2020) Award of supply contract for "seven (7) thermal imaging cameras (long range) type Jim Compact cooled" https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%962646%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-00%CE%9D; MCP (2020) Award of supply contract for "thirty (30) Pulsar Accolade 2 LRF XP50 thermal imaging cameras (lightweight)" https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A9%CE%97%CE%A8%CE%9946%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-407; MCP (2020) Award of contract for the supply of "nine (9) portable thermal binoculars (binoculars)" https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A827346%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%A4%CE%94%CE%92

131   MCP (2022) APPROVAL OF EXPENDITURE https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/6%CE%A68646%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%929%CE%9C

132   Alpha 2022; MCP (2023) Assumption of obligation https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/61%CE%A9%CE%9346%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%A0%CE%A6%CE%A0; MCP (2019) Assumption of obligation https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A9%CE%9A%CE%92%CE%A846%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-1%CE%91%CE%A0

133   Information & and evidence received from informant

134   MMA (2024) Supply of portable thermal imaging cameras for external border control, https://tamey.gov.gr/bmvi-2021-2027/calls/028/

135   BVMN (2023) 30 People pushed back without shoes and jackets, https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-6-2023-near-ipsala-turkey/; BVMN (2021) Fuck your mother big cow make space or I will let you drown in the river, https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/november-6-2021-1200-soufli-nasuhbey/ BVMN (2021) They screamed and told one of us 'fuck you and fuck camp.', https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/july-7-2021-0000-lagyna/

Vehicles with thermovision equipment

The Greek authorities procured thermovision vans [TVVs], equipped with radar, thermal cameras, distance metres, telescopic mast, communication and data transfer systems, in 2012[136]. Although it is unclear how many were deployed in Evros, reports by the Soufli border guard suggest that TVV vans were used in the area between 2010 and 2014[137]. TVV vans have also been provided by Frontex under their JOs in the area[138].

In 2021, the Hellenic Police bought five Shladot David HX5 vehicles equipped with thermovision cameras that were acquired through an ISF emergency funding scheme[139]. According to statements by Greek officials and Israeli media, the five vans were deployed.

In 2021, the Hellenic Police bought five Shladot David HX5 vehicles equipped with thermovision cameras that were acquired through an ISF emergency funding scheme. According to statements by Greek officials and Israeli media, the five vans were deployed in Evros[140]. We were unable to locate or see any of the vehicles during the field assessment.

Vessels with surveillance equipment

At least one patrol vessel used in the delta of river Evros is equipped with a thermal camera and marine radar[141]. The boat was refurbished with surveillance and telecommunications equipment by the ANDROMEDA project[142]. During the field assessment we saw the boat patrolling in the area of the Delta.

The Greek authorities intend to acquire 10 patrol boats equipped with thermovision cameras under the 2021–2027 Border Management and Visa Instrument [BMVI], specifically for surveillance in the Evros river[143]. The three million euro budget will also provide for training police officers in their use. The three million euro budget will also provide for training police officers in their use[144].

136   MCP (2012) 22-10-2012: Announcement of an open process tender for the supply of special vehicles https://www.astynomia.gr/2012/10/22/22-10-2012-prokiryxi-diagonismou-anoiktis-diadikasias-pou-afora-tin-promitheia-eidikon-ochimatontypou-van-exoplisme-na-me-rantar-thermiki-kamera-apostasiometro-tileskopiko-isto-systima-epikoinoni/
137   Soufli BGD archives
138   Material received from informant; Soufli BGD archives; https://x.com/Frontex/status/1384428195236225028
139   MCP (2022) Approval of the re-postponement of the delivery time of no. 171/2021 of the Contract, between the Hellenic Police Headquarters and the economic operator with the name "SHLADOT LTD", for the supply of "Five (5) armored vehicles 4X4 type ''DAVID'' (HUMMER)", total value #1.079.999 ,98# euros, including VAT, deductions, expenses and ETT, without penalty, https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A893746%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-554
140   Boyuslavski, E. (2023, 15 May) Greek police use Israeli Shladot's "David" armored vehicle, https://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/58180; Eleftheros Typos (2023, 14 September) Θεσσαλονίκη: Τα «μάτια» του Έβρου στη ΔΕΘ - Αυτά είναι τα νέα οχήματα της ΕΛΑΣ https://www.typosthes.gr/thessaloniki/326787_thessaloniki-ta-matia-toy-ebroy-sti-deth-ayta-einai-ta-nea-ohimata-tis-elas
141   OPEN TV (2020, 7 June) Evros; Patrol with Police Vessel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwykQArWOi0
142   Andromeda 2021
143   MMA (2024) Supply of flotation devices for inland waters (lakes) with integrated thermal imaging cameras and training of operators in the use of the old and new flotation devices with the acquisition of a diploma, https://tamey.gov.gr/bmvi-2021-2027/calls/029/
144   ibid

Drones

A description of the existing border surveillance system in 2018 includes 'UAVs with a long-range thermal and a day camera'[145]. Other than this, there is little evidence to document the use of drones at the Evros border before 2020, at least outside the scope of EU-funded projects such as EWISA.

However, evidence suggests that the use of drones has increased since 2020. A law regulating the use of unmanned aircrafts, including for 'dealing with illegal immigration in the border areas' was passed in 2019[146]. In 2022, specialised offices for UAVs were established within the police directorates of Alexandroupoli and Orestiada[147]. A few months after the events of February/March 2020, Greek media reported that the use of drones was one of the measures adopted to reinforce the Evros border[148]. According to a statement by the then Minister of Citizen Protection, drones were used for border surveillance in early 2021[149]. Later that year, the Greek authorities demonstrated the use of drones – specifically quadcopters [πολυκόπτερα in Greek tendering documents] – to the media[150].

Official documents provide evidence that the police directorates of Orestiada and Alexandroupoli have at least one drone each, while one drone appears to operate within the subsystem of the Evros Delta. Two drones were donated to the Hellenic Police in 2019 by EU-funded research project EWISA[151]. Two drones were donated to the Hellenic Police in 2019 by EU-funded research project EWISA[152].

Drones have been used for the detection and surveillance of border crossers[153] as well as for filming rescues of people stranded on islets on the river Evros[154]. Testimonies of people crossing the border or stranded on islets also report seeing or

145   CAMELOT (2018) User Requirements and Use Cases, https://www.camelot-project.eu/results

146   Hellenic Republic (2019) Law 4650/2019 Regulations of the Ministry of National Defence and other provisions https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-enoples-dynameis/nomos-4650-2019-phek-207a-17-12-2019.html

Homo Digitalis (2020) Homo Digitalis' input to the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerancehttps://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/report-race-borders-and-digital-technologies

147   MCP (2022) Establishment of Unmanned Aircraft Offices in the internal structure of the Staffs of the General Police Directorate of Thessaloniki and the General Regional Police Directorates of the Country https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%99%CE%A0%CE%A546%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%94%CE%A33

148   The TOC (2020, 28 May) Thermal cameras, drones and helicopters: The Evros wall on land and in the air https://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/thermikes-kameres-drones-kai-elikoptera-to-teixos-tou-ebrou-se-steria-kai-aera/

149   To Vima (2021, 19 February) Evros: The fence, the drones and snow https://www.tovima.gr/2021/02/19/opinions/evros-o-fraktis-ta-drones-kai-o-xionias/

150   Gatopoulos and Kantouris 2021

151   Andromeda 2023; MCP (2022) Assignment of the supply of one (1) Unmanned Aircraft System - UAS, for the needs of the Unmanned Aircraft Office of the Orestiada Police Department https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%A9%CE%9C%CE%A546%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%97%CE%A3%CE%A4; MCP (2023) Direct procurement of one (1) Unmanned Aircraft System - UAS (Unmanned Aircraft System - UAS) https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/6%CE%A4%CE%92%CE%A846%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%92-%CE%91%CE%A73

152   MCP (2021) Decision of Acceptance of Donation https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A950%CE%9646%CE%9C%CE%9A6%CE%A0-2%CE%A3%CE%97

153   Alarmphone (2022, 31 March) NON-assistance for 34 people stuck on a Greek islet in the border river between Turkey and Greece, https://alarmphone.org/en/2022/03/31/non-assistance-for-34-people/; Nedos, V (2023, 21 June) Greek-Turkish cooperation at Evros border, I Kathimerini, https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/1213652/greek-turkish-cooperation-at-evros-border/; Efsyn (2022, 16 March) They deny locating the refugees in Evros while they are operating a commando [Video] https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/koinonia/335982_arnoyntai-ton-entopismo-ton-prosfygon-ston-ebro-tin-ora-poy-epiheiroyn; Respondents 2, 6;

154   Hellenic Police (2023) Rescue of -17- illegal immigrants from an island in the river Evros, 10 May 2023, https://www.astynomia.gr/2023/05/10/10-05-2023-diasosi-17-mi-nomimon-metanaston-apo-nisida-tou-potamou-evrou/; (2023) Rescue of -37- illegal immigrants from an island in the river Evros, 21 May, https://www.astynomia.gr/2023/05/21/21-05-2023-diasosi-37-mi-nomimon-metanaston-apo-nisida-tou-potamou-evrou/

hearing drones in the vicinity[155]. In two testimonies published by BVMN, respondents reported drones were used to monitor the Turkish side of the border before a pushback[156].

The Greek authorities also plan to expand drone capacity under the 2021-2027 BMVI funding instrument. REACTION, a project funded with 3.7 million Euros, is financed at 90% by the EU and run by a consortium of Greek and Cypriot security agencies and universities. The project will fund the purchase of three new drones and aims 'to integrate innovative technologies, such as artificial intelligence, so as to facilitate the process of gathering information on dangerous incidents involving migrants'[157] Using 'innovative algorithms', drones will be able to track autonomously detected persons[158]. However, there are doubts that the commercial quadcopters demonstrated at the launch of the project are capable of integrating complex AI functions[159].

Management Incident Mobile Centres

Under the 2021-2027 BMVI, the Greek authorities intend to acquire 27 incident management mobile centres (MIMC) to be used in land border surveillance 'in areas that cannot be monitored by existing means'[160]. The MIMCs will be vans and containers housing mobile surveillance camera systems as well as drones and systems to transmit images to control centres[161]. It is unclear whether these systems would be used in Evros[162].

155   BVMN (2022) All that you have to do to stay alive is follow their orders, https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-26-2022-0000-mikrochori-gr-to-kiremitcisalih-tr/; They told them in Arabic: "Don't make the officer upset, let us beat you, just follow the orders, we bring you near to Edirne, stop trying before you lose your life", https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/march-22-2022-0000-nea-vyssa-gr-to-bosna-tr/; BVMN (2021) I knew he would catch me… BVMN (2021) I knew he would catch me…; Alarmphone (2023) Evros: the brutal face of the European border regime, https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/08/07/evros-the-brutal-face-of-the-european-border-regime/?post_type_release_type=post; Alarmphone (2023) Evros one week on: Another chapter in the deadly European border regime https://alarmphone.org/en/2023/08/15/evros-one-week-on-another-chapter-in-the-deadly-european-border-regime/?post_type_release_type=post; GCR 2023; GCR (2022) Another illegal pushback, ignoring the ECHTR and the Supreme Court, 26 July
156   BVMN (2020) If we had known, we would not have come to Thessaloniki. But I thought we have papers, we have UNHCR documents, nothing will happen to us! https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/august-27-2020-0900-thessaloniki-greece; BVMN (2022) They started beating us for almost five minutes everywhere in our body. We were screaming, 'please sir, please sir' but they didn't care about what we were saying, https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/june-11-2022-0500-palli-greece-to-uyuklutatarturkey/
157   MMA (2022) Specific Action REACTION: Real-time Artificial Intelligence for Border Surveillance via RPAS data analytics to support Law Enforcement Agencies,https://migration.gov.gr/en/ma/reaction/
158   Monroy, M. (2022, 3 October) Artificial intelligence for border surveillance: Greece tests autonomous drone swarms https://digit.site36.net/2022/10/03/artificial-intelligence-for-border-surveillance-greece-tests-autonomous-drone-swarms/
159   Lulamae, J. (2022) Greece plans automated drones to spot people crossing border https://algorithmwatch.org/en/greece-plans-automated-drones/
160   MMA 2024
161   MMA 2024
162   E-Evros (2020) Kipoi: Provision of mobile vehicle scanning units to detect irregular migrants, 20 January https://www.e-evros.gr/gr/eidhseis/3/khpoi-promh8eia-kinhtwn-monadwn-sarwshs-oxhmatwn-gia-entopismo-paratypwn-metanastwn/post39401; MCP (2018) Financing of the Action "Supply of mobile vehicle scanning units for the detection of any hidden unlawful migrants", p.1https://www.ydeap.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/%CE%A90%CE%9A4465%CE%A7%CE%987-42%CE%97.pdf

3.1.3 Other technologies

Heartbeat detectors are used in the border crossing points of Kastanies and Kipoi to detect people on the move hidden in vehicles[163]. An X-ray mobile vehicle scanner acquired to detect 'unlawful migrants hidden in vehicles' is also used in the Kipoi border crossing point[164].

3.1.4 Military equipment

While it is considerably more difficult to trace military surveillance equipment in Evros, open source materials – such as media coverage of officials' visits in Evros – show that the military has surveillance technologies including thermovision equipment at their disposal[165]. Similarly to the police, military brigades in Evros have also received donations of thermovision cameras and a patrol boat with surveillance equipment[166]. According to media reports, since 2020 the military has been upgrading surveillance equipment at all fylakia – military observation facilities – in Evros.

While the primary role of the military is territorial defence, there is evidence to suggest its surveillance equipment is used for the detection of PoM. Police were reported to be using the equipment of military facilities near the border for surveillance[167]. A local respondent similarly shared that a military officer serving in a fylakio near the river relayed – in a social interaction – that thermovision cameras in the facility were used to detect border crossers[168]. Since 2020, military surveillance cameras in North Evros have reportedly been feeding images to a room next to the one used by the police in the operational centre in Nea Vyssa, and army and police monitoring teams were in constant contact[169]. Similarly, local media reported that the military had allocated personnel to staff the local and regional operational centers of the ABSS[170].

163 MCP (2014) Submission of supporting documents for the expenditure incurred for the supply, configuration and delivery in full operation, of one (1) heartbeat detection system, https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/7%CE%A3%CE%979%CE%99-%CE%92%CE%958; E-Evros (2018) The... heartbeat of the migrants will be detected by the Police in Evros, 27 August, https://www.e-evros.gr/gr/eidhseis/3/ton-kardiako-palmo-twn-metanastwn-8a-entopizoyn-oi-astynomikoi-ston-ebro/post35831

164 Souliotis 2020; Ethnos 2020; Euro2day.gr (2008, 24 June) Theon: Delivery of 147 Thermal Cameras to the Military https://www.euro-2day.gr/news/enterprises/article/341286/theon-paradosh-147-thermikon-kameron-sto-strato.html

165 Defence Review (2020, 13 March) Theon Sensors by the side of Armed Forces: Reiforcement with thermal cameras https://defencereview.gr/h-theon-sensors-dipla-stis-enoples-dynameis-enisch/;Voria (2020) Thermal cameras in the army from the Professional Chamber of Thessaloniki for border surveillance https://www.voria.gr/article/thermikes-kameres-ston-strato-apo-to-eeth-gia-ti-filaxi-ton-sinoron; Evros 24 (2020, 19 April) A surveillance vessel for the Evros Delta was received by the army https://www.evros24.gr/yper-skafos-epitirisis-gia-to-delta-evr/

166 In newspaper (2022) Evros; military outposts - "fortresses" on the border, https://www.in.gr/2022/01/15/greece/evros-fylakia-astakoi-sti-synoriogrammi/; Dimokratiki (2020) The outposts of Evros and the border islands are turning into fortresses – Aerial surveillance with drones, https://www.dimokratiki.gr/12-05-2020/se-froyria-metatrepontai-ta-fylakia-toy-evroy-kai-ton-akritikon-nision-me-drones-i-enaeria-epitirisi/

167 Souliotis 2020

168 Respondents 6

169 To Ethnos 2020

170 E-Evros (2021) The Orestiada Police Department requests that the thermal cameras on the Evros fence be replaced, https://www.e-evros.gr/gr/eidhseis/3/na-antikatasta8oyn-oi-8ermikes-kameres-ston-fraxth-toy-ebroy-zhta-h-astynomikh-diey8ynsh-orestiadas/post45244

3.1.5 Surveillance and control technologies at the Fylakio RIC and PRDC

According to the MMA, security infrastructures at the Fylakio site include entry being controlled by 'turnstiles, magnetic gates, x-rays' and a two-factor access control system (identity and fingerprint). A Closed Circuit Surveillance System (CCTV), which uses 'intelligent' software in order to warn in time of any emergency events, monitors the internal areas of the facility[171]. Alerts and images, according to the description, are transmitted to 'the Local Incident Center, to the Control Center in Athens and to the Control Centers of other involved bodies (e.g. Hellenic Police)'[172].

The description of the Fylakio security arrangements points to two flagship and controversial (see section 3.2.2) security and information systems: Centaur [Κένταυρος], which is an 'integrated digital management system of digital and physical security' and Hyperion [Υπερίων], described as 'an access control and provision monitoring system'[173]. While the development of security infrastructures at Fylakio predated the official launch of Centaur in 2021, the installation of the system was planned since early 2021, as evidenced in European Commission documents[174]. Centaur is financed both by ISF and the EU Resilience and Recovery Fund[175].

In addition to the elements mentioned in the description of the Fylakio security system, Centaur includes fire alarms, an announcement system, and the use of drones for the detection of 'unlawful behaviour of individuals or groups in assembly areas inside the structure'[176]. The latter function was to be assisted by 'AI algorithms' described as 'Artificial Intelligence Behavioural analytics', while the drones were to perform 'assessment of cases within the structure without human intervention', similarly suggesting an element of automation facilitated by AI[177]. The AI elements were not mentioned in the calls for tender but persist in later descriptions of the system[178].

Likewise, the entry control infrastructure mentioned in the description is part of the Hyperion project, where access to a facility is permitted only by presenting a specific identity card and having one's fingerprints scanned at smart gates[179]. This measure applies equally to PoM detained in such facilities, staff and visitors – for example NGO staff and lawyers[180].

According to information provided by the MMA to the Hellenic Data Protection Authority [HDPA] in March 2023, the Centaur system was in pilot operation in Fylakio[181]. The full operation of the system is unlikely as the project appears to be still implemented, including its components concerning the

171   MMA (2024) Fylakio RIC https://migration.gov.gr/ris/perifereiakes-monades/kyt-domes/k-y-t-orestiadas/
172   ibid
173   Hellenic Republic (2023) Centaur System, https://digitalstrategy.gov.gr/project/kentayros; Hellenic Republic (2021) HYPERION: Design, Implementation, Installation & Operation of an Access Control System and Monitoring of Benefits for Refugees and Migrants Living in Temporary Reception and Hospitality Structures, https://greece20.gov.gr/?projects=psifiakos-metaschimatismos-systimatos-metanasteysis-kai-asyloy-16763-3
174   MMA (2021) STAGE A - Pre-Selection - Call for Expression of Interest - "Integrated Digital Electronic and Physical Security Management System", https://www.politischios.gr/pdf/%CE%A8%CE%986646%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-9%CE%A15.pdf; MMA (2021) STAGE B – Call for submission of offers - "Integrated Digital Electronic and Physical Security Management System", https://www.contracts.gr/v1/tenders/KMDS/21PROC008804561; MMA (2021) Decision to Incorporate the "KENTAUROS" https://diavgeia.gov.gr/doc/6240%CE%97-1%CE%A6%CE%A3?inline=true; European Commission (2021) Technical Meeting with Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 12 February 2021. Copy with the author.
175   MMA 2020; MMA (2021) Decision to Incorporate the "KENTAUROS" https://diavgeia.gov.gr/doc/6240%CE%97-1%CE%A6%CE%A3?inline=true

176   MMA (2020) inclusion, p.4; MMA (2021) Decision to Incorporate
177   ibid
178   MMA (2021) STAGE A; MMA (2021) Stage B;MMA (2023) Amendment of the Decision on the Incorporation of the Project "CENTAUROS: Incident Management Center for the Integrated Digital Electronic and Physical Security Management System with Cybersecurity Support https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%92%CE%9D%CE%A5%CE%97-0%CE%976
179   Hellenic Republic 2021, Hyperion; Chelioudakis, E. (2024) Unpacking AI-enabled border management technologies in Greece: To what extent their development and deployment are transparent and respect data protection rules?, Computer Law & Security Review, Volume 53, July 2024
180   ibid
181   HPDA (2024) Independent investigation into the development and installation of the "Kentauros" and "Hyperion" Programs, https://www.dpa.gr/el/enimerwtiko/prakseisArxis/aytepaggelti-ereyna-gia-tin-anaptyxi-kai-egkatastasi-ton-programmaton

operation of drones. [182]In the case of Fylakio, implementation is affected by a parallel project of the expansion facilities[183]. Both systems also involve the collection of biometric data which will be discussed in the following section.

3.1.6 Evros as a testing ground for border technologies

The surveillance subsystem in the Delta of river Evros described in section 3.1.1.3 illustrates how EU funded projects are a further avenue through which technologies can be acquired. Greek security agencies, security institute KEMEA which is affiliated with the Ministry of Citizen Protection [MCP], university departments and Greek companies are active participants in EU-funded research projects related to security technologies[184]. Many of these projects use Evros as a testing ground. Trials of the technologies developed by project partners have been carried out in the area, some of them involving 'scenarios' in which the use of technologies are tested in simulations of real-life conditions. These projects include:

- **EWISA** (Early Warning for Situational Awareness, 2014-2019) aimed at developing land border surveillance capacities and cooperation, in particular the collection and analysis of data and images from surveillance cameras[185]. The testing phase involved the ABSS in north Evros, as evidenced by the project's photographs[186].

- **CAMELOT** (C2 Advanced Multi-domain Environment and Live Observation Tech-

nologies, 2017-2021) was to expand command and control capabilities by integrating situational data obtained by 'manned' and 'unmanned' surveillance technologies[187]. Its drones were tested in the area of Orestiada, using the existing surveillance infrastructure[188].

- **FOLDOUT** (2018-2022) aimed at developing border surveillance technologies for detection through areas with dense foliage. It developed systems combining sensors with 'machine learning algorithms' to 'perceive, localize, track and classify objects into humans, vehicles and other objects'[189]. Evros was one of the border areas where the project's technologies were tested in 2021.

- **ANDROMEDA** (An Enhanced Common Information Sharing Environment for Border Command, Control and Coordination Systems, 2019-2021) aimed at developing the scope of CISE, the EU's Common Information Sharing Environment, to land borders. Three scenarios of the project – 'illegal immigration', SAR and smuggling – were tested at the Evros border[190]. The trial also involved the construction of an 18 metre pylon in the Delta of river Evros, equipped with a camera, marine radar and AIS sensor; a patrol boat equipped with a thermal camera and radar in the same area, and a 'cage' with a camera and surveillance control equipment in the area of Orestiada[191]. As of April 2024, this equipment in the Delta of Evros is still in place and believed to be used by the Hellenic Police.

- **EFFECTOR** (An End to End Interopera-

182   MMA (2024) Decision approving the minutes of the Monitoring and Receiving Committee fhttps://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%A4%CE%A9%CE%9946%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-%CE%A1%CE%9C2; MMA (2024) Amendment of the Agreement for the provision of operational operations to the KYT & KED of the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/98%CE%A7%CE%9146%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-145

183   MMA (2024) 4th Amendment of the Act "Upgrading the Existing Structure of par. 4 of article 8 of Law 4375/2016, at Fylakio in Evros https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/9%CE%984%CE%9846%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-%CE%991%CE%96

184   Respondent 5; Leontopoulos, N (2020) Broken Horizon: In Greece, research in automation fails to find applications https://algorithmwatch.org/en/greece-ai-research-horizon2020-secure-societies/

185   EWISA (2023) Project https://www.ewisa-project.eu/index.php/project; European Commission (2017) EARLY WARNING FOR INCREASED SITUATIONAL AWARENESS https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/608174

186   EWISA (2023) Greece Border Guard https://www.ewisa-project.eu/index.php/greece-border-guard

187   European Commission (2023) C2 Advanced Multi-domain Environment and Live Observation Technologies https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/740736

188   https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3080392588859462

189   FOLDOUT (2024) FOLDOUT Border surveillance made smart and seamless https://foldout.eu/; FOLDOUT (2021) FOLDOUT Greece Test 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vryn797T-e4&ab_channel=FOLDOUT

190   ANDROMEDA 2021; European Commission (2022) An EnhaNceD Common InfoRmatiOn Sharing EnvironMent for BordEr CommanD, Control and CoordinAtion Systems https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/833881

191   ANDROMEDA 2021

bility Framework For MaritimE Situational Awareness at StrategiC and TacTical OpeRations, 2020–2022) aimed at developing data sharing and interoperability in the context of maritime surveillance systems[192]. The Greek maritime trial took place at the coast between Alexandroupoli and the Delta of Evros as well as Samothraki island[193]. Similarly to the ANDROMEDA and NESTOR trials, the Dasiko Periptero facility was used as a hub for the trial[194].

- **NESTOR** (2021-2022) aimed to 'develop a next-generation holistic border surveillance system that will provide long-range and wide area surveillance capabilities', combining surveillance technologies with AI, visual and social media analysis[195]. Surveillance technologies such as unmanned vehicles, drones, underwater cameras and augmented reality headsets, were tested in three locations in Evros – Samothraki, Marasia and the Delta of Evros river[196]. A pylon with a thermovision camera and a Radio-Frequency localisation system are still in place at the Dasiko Periptero building in the Delta of Evros.

- **BorderUAS** (Semi-autonomous border surveillance platform combining next generation unmanned aerial vehicles with ultra-high-resolution, multi-sensor surveillance payload, 2020-2023) was to develop an unmanned surveillance aerial vehicle[197]. The third trial of the project was to take place in the countryside of Evros region in late May 2024[198].

- **Flexicross** (Flexible and Improved Border-Crossing Experience for Passengers and Authorities, 2022-2025) aims at developing capacity for border checks at border crossing points, including portable equipment for biometric tests and developing Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and predictive analytics[199]. An early trial of the project took place at the Ormenio Border Crossing Point in May 2024[200].

While the above projects were financed by EU research funding schemes, REACTION, the project aimed at developing autonomous drone swarms that will likely be tested in Evros, is funded by BMVI[201]. In addition, Frontex in cooperation with Hellenic Coast Guard tested an aerostat equipped with sensors, electro-optical and thermal cameras, radar and automatic identification system receivers near Alexandroupoli airport in autumn 2021[202].

3.2 Collection of (biometric) data from PoM in the country

3.2.1 Biometric data collection upon apprehension and the Alien Traffic Mapping information system

EU and Greek legal frameworks stipulate that a range of (biometric) data can be collected in the context of arrest, reception and asylum seeking. Personal information and fingerprints are entered in the Eurodac database, in line with the relevant

192 European Commission (2023) Periodic Reporting for period 1 - EFFECTOR, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/883374/reporting
193 EFFECTOR (2022) EFFECTOR Greek Trial, https://www.effector-project.eu/2022/07/08/effector-greek-trial-2/
194 Effector (2023) EFFECTOR H2020 Project | Greek Trial, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlosYOv7KR4
195 European Commission (2024) aN Enhanced pre-frontier intelligence picture to Safeguard The EurOpean boRders, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101021851/reporting
196 NESTOR 2023
197 European Commission (2024) Semi-autonomous border surveillance platform combining next generation unmanned aerial vehicles with ultra-high-resolution multi-sensor surveillance payload https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/883272
198 BorderUAS (2024) PRESS RELEASE: 3RD FIELD TRIAL, https://borderuas.eu/press-release-3rd-field-trial/

199 European Commission (2023) Flexible and Improved Border-Crossing Experience for Passengers and Authorities https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101073879; FLEXI-cross (2023) Background & Motivation https://flexicross-project.eu/concept-and-methodology/
200 Flexi-Cross (2024) Early Validation FLEXI-cross tool in Ormenio, https://flexicross-project.eu/early-validation-flexi-cross-tool-in-ormenio/
201 MMA 2024
202 Frontex (2021, 14 October) Frontex tests aerostat systems in Greece for border surveillance, https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-tests-aerostat-systems-in-greece-for-border-surveillance-b5E9I8

regulation[203]. A range of data including fingerprints, photos, personal data and information feeds into the SIS II information system[204]. Similarly, Greek law stipulates the collection of 'personal data and fingerprints' of persons who apply for international protection or have entered Greece without authorisation in the context of registration procedures conducted in CCACs or RICs[205].

The key platform for managing (biometric) data is the application 'Alien Traffic Mapping' [ATM] (Χαρτογράφηση Κυκλοφορίας Αλλοδαπών), which is part of Police On Line, the information system used by the Hellenic Police since 2010[206]. Upon arrest for irregular entry, the police initiate a case of 'Illegal Migration Case Management' file which includes the name, nationality, age and sex of the apprehended person and biometric data, such as a photo and fingerprints[207]. In addition, it includes information on the place and manner of arrest, the route followed before entry, the place of origin and destination of the individual, means of transport, information on confiscated devices and forged documents, intention to apply for asylum, and records of uploading information on Eurodac and the National Fingerprint Database[208].

A similar file is created to manage 'Reception and Identification' cases. In addition to the information included in the 'illegal migration management case', the RIC file includes medical records and information on vulnerability[209]. While a 2019 joint ministerial decision refers to the collection of palm prints, a call for tender for the upgrading of the ATP system makes no reference to it. The ATP system also includes 'asylum case management' files, which in addition to biographical and biometric data include information on asylum applications, Dublin case management files, and Return management files[210]. In addition, local BGDs also maintain detainee records which include personal data such as names, patronymics, nationality, and likely descriptions as to whether a detainee was 'collaborative' or a flight risk[211].

The different case management files within the Alien Traffic Mapping system are interconnected and the system is interoperable with both Eurodac and SIS II[212].

Moreover, it is interoperable with large-scale systems and databases which are under the responsibility of the MMA – Centaur, Hyperion and ALKYONI II.

203   European Parliament and Council (2013) REGULATION (EU) No 603/2013 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 26 June 2013on the establishment of □Eurodac□ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32013R0603; Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, Ministry of Citizen Protection, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Migration Policy (2019) Joint Ministerial Decision No. 1/7433/2019; General Regulation of the Operation of Reception and Identification Centers and Mobile Reception and Identification Units, https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-allodapoi/koine-upourgike-apophase-174332019.html
204   European Parliament and Council (2018) Regulation (EU) 2018/1861 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32018R1861#d1e1995-14-1
205   Hellenic Republic (2022) Law 4936/2022 Ratification of a Code of Legislation on the reception, international protection of third country citizens and stateless persons and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced foreigners https://www.kodiko.gr/nomothesia/document/797068/nomos-4939-2022
206   Hellenic Police (2009, 2 May) Informatics in the Police - Police On Line https://www.astynomia.gr/2009/05/02/i-pliroforiki-stin-astynomia-police-on-line; Hellenic Parliament (2020) RE: Question no. 4457/24-2-2020 https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/11237096.pdf
207   MCP (2016) Upgrading of Existing Information systems of the Greek Police for the registration of Third Country Nationals https://www.astynomia.gr/file/2016/11/11112016-diakiriksi.sing_.pdf; Triandou, N. (2020) The European Migration Policy in Greece and management procedures. The case of the island of Rhodes. Master's Thesis University of the Aegean https://hellanicus.lib.aegean.gr/bitstream/handle/11610/23910/%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20-%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%204332019010.pdf?sequence=1
208   Interview with police director, 2018; European Parliament and Council 2018
209   MoD et al 2019; MCP 2016
210   ibid
211   CPT 2020; Soufli BGD archives
212   MCP 2016

3.2.2 Hyperion and Centaur

Hyperion and Centaur, the two systems that are to be deployed in Fylakio, also entail the collection and processing of biometric and non-biometric data. Data collected under Hyperion involves including photos and fingerprints[213], as well as names, patronymics, nationality, age and sex, the asylum case file number of applicants for international protection, and the Foreigner's Temporary Insurance and Health Care Number (known as PAAYPA in Greek)[214]. Similar biometric and personal data, as well as information about their professional roles, are stored for staff and NGO workers and volunteers[215]. In addition Hyperion ICT system stores information about PoM's access to services and goods such as food, essential items, medical care and financial benefits, as well as their health records and diet[216]. Their entries and departures, along with specific reasons for leaving the facility and their destinations, and transfers between facilities are also recorded[217].

Biometric information is contained in a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) card, which allows entry and exit and access to services such as catering and essential items. ID cards are to be used by staff and visitors, such as NGO members[218]. The Hyperion system also includes a smartphone application which provides PoM with personalised information – including on the progress of their asylum application[219].

The Centaur system collects personal and biometric data, such as images and videos from CCTV cameras and drones operating in facilities[220]. The use of AI algorithms and behaviour analytics, although unclear if fully implemented yet, could also entail the collection of sensitive data that could be linked to identifiable persons[221]. According to a respondent, CCTV footage might be used to train algorithms in Samos CCAC, although it is unclear if this is the case in other facilities[222].

There is little information concerning the storage, retention and processing arrangements for the data collected in the Hyperion or Centaur system in tendering documents. The DPIA on the Centaur system, states that video footage is stored for 15 days after which it is automatically deleted[223]. However, if an 'incident' is detected, footage can be separately retained for up to three months if it concerns a 'third person' in order to facilitate further investigation[224]. If requested by the police, prosecutorial or judicial authorities, the footage can be saved in a USB drive with the approval of the DPO. No time limit for retention is specified in this case[225]. It is also unclear if and how the data and information gathered by the two systems would be shared with European agencies.

The lack of transparency and safeguards regarding those two projects were noted soon after their launch by investigative media and civil society organisations[226]. The MMA

213   Ministry of Digital Governance (no date) HYPERION IT System, https://digitalstrategy.gov.gr/project/yperion; MMA (2023) Provision of integrated digital Immigration services and Cybersecurity infrastructures, https://migration.gov.gr/parochi-olokliromenon-psifiakon-ypiresion-metanasteysis-kai-ypodomes-kyvernoasfaleias
214   ibid
215   ibid
216   ibid
217   ibid
218   Ministry of Digital Governance n.d.
219   MMA 2023; Chelioudakis 2024
220   MMA (2020) Centaur; MMA (2021) Centaur; MMA (2021) Stage A; MMA (2021) Stage B
221   Emmanouilidou, L. (2023) Greek Data Watchdog To Rule on AI Systems in Refugee Camps, https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/greek-data-watchdog-rule-ai-systems-refugee-camps
222   Respondent 8
223   MMA (2023) Video surveillance and cameras system in Reception Service accommodation structures: Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA), https://migration.gov.gr/privacy-policy/
224   ibid
225   ibid
226   Emmanouilidou, L. and Fallon, K. (2021) With drones and thermal cameras, Greek officials monitor refugees, With drones and thermal cameras, Greek officials monitor refugees

had not conducted a DPIA before their design and implementation as required by law, nor had appointed a Data Protection Officer[227]. Yet the system appeared to be partly in operation when demonstrated to the media. The Ministry also appeared to disregard risks for populations in a particularly vulnerable position, such as UAMs[228]. The European Commission, on its part, cited the lack of a legal act regulating the use of drones and governing the retention of data collected in this manner[229]. As a result of many identi-fied shortcomings in the planning and implementation of the two projects, civil society organisations Homo Digitalis and HIAS and academic Niovi Vavoulia submitted a com-plaint to the HDPA in 2021. In its ruling published in April 2024, the HDPA found that the MMA had violated multiple provisions of the GDPR legislation[230].

3.2.3 ALKYONI II

ALKYONI II is the asylum services information management system of the MMA. The sys-tem provides digital support for the full asylum process, allowing for the electronic sub-mission and management of applications, the submission of relevant documentation, and the issuance of asylum decisions and documents such as residence and travel permits[231]. Like other large scale systems, it involves the storage and processing of data, including biometric data, personal and demographic information, sensitive informa-tion pertaining to asylum applications, as well as social security information such as tax numbers[232]. The system has been in operation since at least 2020, supported by and interoperable with Hellenic Police platforms such as Police On Line[233].

In 2022, it was announced that ALKYONI II would be upgraded[234]. The upgrade, originally announced in 2022 and tendered in 2023, was a part of a larger project of providing inte-grated digital services to the MMA and was funded by the Resilience and Recovery Fund like Hyperion and partly Centaur[235]. The contract was awarded to a consortium of three telecom companies, Byte, Vodafone and Panafon, in June 2023[236]. The project appears to be in implementation and, according to civil society organisations, the upgrade of the Ministry's information system has led to significant disruptions of asylum services[237].

According to the Ministry's digital security police published in 2024, only authorised staff of the Asylum Service, Appeals Authority and Reception Service have access to the AL-

227   European Commission 2021
228   HDPA 2024
229   European Commission (2021) Technical Meeting with the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, 12 February 2021. Copy with the author.
230   HDPA 2024
231   Hellenic Republic (2023) Integrated asylum management system – ALKYONI II https://digitalstrategy.gov.gr/project/alkyoni_ii;
232   Ministry of Digital Governance (2021) Availability of the online service "Return and deactivation of TINs of applicants for international protection" at the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum, https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/9%CE%A7%0%CE%9546%CE%9C%CE%A4%CE%9B%CE%A0-%CE%95%CE%A1%CE%A7; MMA (2024) Ministry of Migration and Asylum Security Policy Circular https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/%CE%A8%CE%A92%CE%9546%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-18%CE%A9
233   MMA (2020) Meeting of the Minister of Migration and Asylum Mr. Notis Mitarakis with the Executive Director of EASO Mr. Nina Gregori, https://migration.gov.gr/synantisi-easo/; Hellenic Republic 2023
234   Hellenic Republic (2022) Consolidated Government Policy Plan 2022; https://www.government.gov.gr/enopiimeno-schedio-kyverni-tikis-politikis-2022/
235   Ministry of Finance (2023) Inclusion of the project "Provision of integrated digital services for Migration and Cybersecurity Infra-structure" in the Recovery and Resilience Fund, https://greece20.gov.gr/en/?projects=parochi-olokliromenon-psifiakon-ypiresion-metanastey-sis-kai-ypodomes-kyvernoasfaleias
236   MMA (2023) Approval of Committee proceedings, https://diavgeia.gov.gr/decision/view/6%CE%A43%CE%9146%CE%9C%CE%94%CE%A8%CE%9F-%CE%9B9%CE%A0
237   Hellenic Republic 2023.; RSA Aegean (2023) The upgrade of the "Alkyoni" system of the Asylum Service leaves processes and people in the air; Mobile Info Team et al (2023) Joint Statement: Shutdown of the Greek Asylum Service database leaves people unable to claim asylum and in limbo, https://www.mobileinfoteam.org/alkyoni

KYONI II system[238]. Although earlier information suggested that the ALKYONI II system would be hosted in the MMA's own infrastructure, it still appears to be hosted in the Police On Line system[239]. It is further described as interoperable with the information systems of the Hellenic Police[240].

3.2.4 Smart Policing

In 2018, the Hellenic Police tendered Smart Policing, an ISF-funded project aimed at implementing 'modern technologies of smart portable devices during foot and vehicle patrols'[241]. The smart devices would enable the police to scan vehicle number plates, fingerprints and faces in order to check them against police databases[242]. This, according to the call for tender, would ease checks on citizens, but also 'expand the effectiveness of checks on third country nationals'[243]. The project was financed by ISF and cost € 3.798.281,30[244].

The project raised many concerns over the racialised policing of migrants in Greece, the use of facial recognition technologies, data protection issues and compliance with EU data protection law[245]. Yet the Hellenic police failed to carry out a data protection impact assessment[246]. Following a complaint by the Greek NGO Homo Digitalis, the HDPA started an investigation in 2020 which appears not to have concluded at the time of writing[247].

The smart devices have been rolled out in Athens and Thessaloniki, but according to a media report, they only appear to be used on a pilot base for traffic violations[248]. It is also unknown if the project was to be implemented in Evros, although the portable devices can operate in any environment that provides a network connection[249].

3.2.5 Unauthorised data collection

In addition to official (biometric) data collection, testimonies of border crossers point to practices that appear questionable – if not outright illegal. In testimonies collected by BVMN, border crossers reported that police used smartphones to take photos and vid-

238   MMA 2024 Security Policy
239   ibid; Hellenic Republic 2023
240   MMA (2023) Provision of integrated services
241   MCP (2016) Technical specifications - Προμήθεια Συστημάτων για έξυπνη Αστυνόμευση – Smart Policing https://www.astynomia.gr/images/stories/2018/prokirikseis18/12042018-texn_prod.pdf
242   ibid; HRW (2022, January 18) Greece: New Biometrics Policing Program Undermines Rights, https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/18/greece-new-biometrics-policing-program-undermines-rights
243   MCP 2018, p.5
244   YDEAP (2023) EMAS 0024 https://ydeap.gr/emas-0024/
245   Homo Digitalis (2020, 31 August) The Greek DPA investigates the Greek Police https://www.homodigitalis.gr/en/posts/7684 HRW 2022; Emmanouilidou, l. (2021) Greek police roll out new 'smart' devices that recognize faces and fingerprints
246   ibid
247   ibid
248   LawandOrder 92024) "Smart Policing": The electronic confirmation of traffic violations has begun in Athens and Thessaloniki - The devices used by police officers, https://lawandorder.gr/smart-policing-ilektroniki-trochonomikes-paravaseis/
249   Interview 1

eos of them[250]. Eight testimonies describe how police officers who apprehended border crossers took photos of them with mobile phones – and on one occasion a video with a camera. The reasons for taking photos in this manner is not known, nor is whether the mobile phones used are issued by the police or privately-owned phones of the officers.

4. Impacts and Risks of Tech

4.1 Impact of technologies on People on the Move

An example of the impact of border surveillance technologies on PoM in Evros emerges from their testimonies. As reported in section 3.1.2, security forces reportedly used binoculars and in one instance a drone to check activity on the Turkish side of the river before conducting pushbacks. In this respect, border surveillance technology is directly implicated in border violence and human rights violations. Another incident highlights the impact of data collection and use of databases. In 2016, a Kurdish man attempted to cross the Evros border in order to request protection. He was instead arrested for re-entering Greece even though he had never been there before. A previous failed visa application led to an entry ban for seven years, which triggered an alert in the SIS II database when he entered Greece[251].

Beyond these specific examples, it is difficult to ascertain specific impacts of technologies on PoM, as opposed to the risks discussed in the following section. While it can be argued that surveillance technologies generally impact on PoM by rendering crossings riskier and pushing them towards more dangerous routes, there is little research or evidence concerning concrete impacts at the Evros border. The difficulties in accessing the field and the secrecy surrounding the use of surveillance technologies in Evros are a significant obstacle. As a respondent observed, 'the use of such [technological] means might have put people's lives in danger,' but he 'had no data' because of the difficulties of accessing Evros, and in particular the militarised river zone[252].

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250   The author of this report experienced ID checks in the area involving local police officers taking photos of ID documents with their mobile phones on two separate occasions. BVMN (2022) Violent pushback of 100 people, including women and minors: "One of the blows struck my head so hard that I lost contact with the world for a moment and thought i'm going to die. [The officers] know the war in Libya, but they don't care and never care. And their way of searching women - it was nasty. And they were crying. And we were completely naked the whole time". https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/may-17-2022-1800-rigio-greece-to-saclimusellim-turkey/; BVMN (2022) "They searched us and even touched our sensitive places in front of women" https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/march-15-2022-1030-orestias-gr-to-karakasim-tr/; BVMN (2022) I was afraid to die - they didn't give me my medicines, do you think they would care if I'm thirsty or hungry? https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/march-1-2022-0000-kornofolia-gr-to-kadidondurma-tr/; BVMN (2022) We were lucky to find a small pool of water and we drank from it like we were animals, https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/january-19-2022-0900-orestias-to-karakasim/; BVMN (2021) I was so afraid to die and alone far of my family just cause I was looking for a fair life https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/november-18-2021-0000-dilofos-kapikule/; BVMN (2021) You are Muslim and we are Christian why come to us go to a Muslim country https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/september-3-2021-1100-dilofos-3-4km-from-yenikadin/; BVMN (2021 They were wearing only shorts and some of them were unconscious and there were traces of beatings on their body https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/june-25-2021-1100-lavara-alibey/; BVMN (2021) They kept kicking, punching, pulling me out and humiliating me and saying 'malaka' https://borderviolence.eu/testimonies/april-5-2021-0000-ivaylovgrad-zoni-and-dilofos-kapikule-2/

251   Zafeiropoulos, K. and Louloudi J. (2022, 30 April) Fortress Europe's digital walls (part 2): Trapped in digital surveillance systems, European Data Journalism Network https://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/el/cp_data_news/%CF%84%CE%B1-%CF%88%CE%B7%CF%86%CE%B9%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%AC-%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%AF%CF%87%CE%B7-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B5%CF%85%CF%81%CF%8E%CF%80%CE%B7%CF%82-%CF%86%CF%81%CE%BF%CF%8D%CF%81%CE%B9%CE%BF-%CE%BC-5/

252   Respondent 2

Further difficulties identified by respondents who engage with PoM in the context of emergencies or legal assistance included being unaware if and what technologies may have been used for their detection[253], having limited knowledge of the technologies present at the Evros border or their exact use[254], especially in relation to specific incidents[255], as well as on practices around data sharing among different actors[256]. Limited organisational capacity was identified as a further obstacle for closer engagement with developments concerning surveillance technology, monitoring its impact or engaging with people on people to explore it more systematically[257].

One further difficulty is disentangling the impact technologies might have from other measures, such as the construction of walls and the reinforcement of local police. State and media narratives can also exaggerate the impact of border technologies since they are keen to stress national capacity to control the border[258].

4.2. Risks of technology for People on the Move

4.2.1 Risks related to surveillance and detection

Despite the limited scope for assessing the impact of technologies on PoM, risks remain well known and extensively identified. The technologies used in Evros aim at increasing detection capacity which, as a respondent observed, PoM might be unaware of:

> "people suddenly find themselves observed by systems, which they don't know, and when they think they might have made it, they find themselves detained"[259]

In the context of Evros, the proliferation of border technologies in recent years can feed into facilitating pushbacks. As argued in the previous section, it is difficult to as-

certain the precise impact of technology. Yet there is little doubt that the availability of technologies increase the capacity of the authorities not only to detect PoM soon after crossing, but also to quickly mobilise resources for their apprehension. Even though detection and apprehension might not lead to pushbacks in all cases, they are necessary first steps. Conversely, the selective use of technology can expose PoM to other forms of border harm, such as abandonment and non-rescue. In cases of PoM stranded off islets, authorities have repeatedly claimed being unable to locate people despite the use of technical means. Technologies appear not to be used for rescue even if, as in the case of the ABSS, explicitly cite such a use[260].

Further, technologies of surveillance push people into choosing more dangerous routes in order to avoid detection or gain access to Greek territory, in tandem with other measures reinforcing the border. One respondent[261] mentioned the deaths of 20 PoM during the wildfires of 2023 as an example whereby surveillance technologies, along with other infrastructures and practices of policing, can expose border crossers to significant risks.

Unauthorised practices of data collection, such taking photos of people with smartphones, also raise several legal and privacy issues related to the transmission, storage and use of biometric data, as well as risks of misuse – for example, if photos in private are shared with far-right groups in the area[262].

253   Respondent 2, 7
254   Respondent 4,6
255   Respondent 2,7
256   Respondent 7
257   Respondent 2,7
258   Respondent 1, Bradley, G.M (2022) Against Borders: The Case for Abolition, London Verso
259   Respondent 2
260   Emmanoulidou and Schmitz 2022; Lulamae 2022
261   Respondent 2
262   Respondent 1

4.2.2 Risks related to (biometric) data collection and processing

Significant risks for the human rights of border crossers, particularly for their privacy and data security, arise from the collection of biometric data, both in the context of large-scale projects and databases and practices of unauthorised data collection.

Many of the risks generated by the design and implementation of the Centaur and Hyperion projects, as well as the (in)actions of the MMA, have been identified by civil society organisations, the HDPA ruling and the European Commission. CCTV systems raise concerns regarding violations of the right to privacy of detainees, especially since initially they appeared to be designed to operate in internal spaces[263]. While there are information notices in facilities alerting to the use of CCTV, they are not sufficient to consider data subjects informed, especially since no mitigating measures – such as face blurring or privacy masking – have been applied[264]. Detainees have also reported that the signs are not particularly visible[265]. Information on CCTV cameras is also provided through a consent form that PoM are obliged to sign when they enter facilities, seen by the researcher. Yet the notice is given only in Greek and English, languages that detainees might not speak.

As the HDPA noted, the information provided by the Ministry to PoM regarding data collection and processing activities in order to seek consent is inadequate, raising concerns regarding the extent to which detainees are informed about their rights in accordance with GDPR. Information in notices was provided only in Greek and English and written in legalistic, technical language[266]. The consent forms further assume knowledge of the GDPR regulation and the Greek legal framework whose provisions are referred to but not explained. The legal basis for consent for data collection and processing activities itself is unclear and does not take into account the needs of vulnerable groups[267]. In addition, PoM might not be fully aware of the data protection rights or the legal frameworks that govern data protection and privacy in Greece[268].

Further, while the behavioural analysis components of the Centaur system might not be fully operational, the HDPA ruling noted that the ministry had not provided any assessment of their impact. Such activities, however, can expose vulnerable populations to risks of racial profiling and harmful policing practices based on predictive activities driven by AI[269].

Data sharing and the interoperability of systems and databases are further areas which can generate risks for PoM. The data collected and stored in both the AMS and MMA systems is largely shared with the two authorities at the level of their design. Hyperion, for example, draws PoM's personal data, according to the MMA, from the ALKYONI II system, which is hosted by the Police On Line system. The Centaur system was designed to be interconnected with a range of state agencies including the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard. Further, while data is processed by contractors of the Centaur and Hyperion system, including for example, the company operating the drones of the Centaur system, no agreements were signed in a timely manner[270].

263   European Commission 2021
264   HDPA 2024
265   Respondent 8
266   HDPA 2024; Respondent 8

267   HDPA 2024
268   Chelioudakis 2024
269   Respondent 1, 5
270   HDPA 2024

5. Conclusion

While spanning over at least two decades, in the case of equipment such as thermovision cameras and binoculars, the use of surveillance technologies in Evros has expanded significantly. This report has mapped the range of surveillance technologies used, ranging from thermovision binoculars to automated surveillance systems which were introduced and developed in particular since 2010. Beyond technologies aimed at primarily monitoring the green border, surveillance technologies such as cameras, drones and entry control systems are being installed in the main detention facility, Fylakio RIC and PDRC. In short, Evros is an example of a highly technologised border, where multiple types of systems and equipment are used to control mobile populations.

The volume of technological surveillance is the result of sustained investment over decades. EU funding programmes – from INTERREG to BMVI – have financed a significant proportion of surveillance technologies and systems in Evros. Yet this report has illustrated that the sources of funding are varied. In addition to national budgets and donations, one of the more unusual avenues for local police forces to acquire surveillance was through EU-funded projects. Evros is known to be a 'technological testing ground', not least because of the number of EU-funded research projects running trials in the area. However, this research evidenced that equipment that was first tested locally has remained on location – specifically in the area of the Delta of the river Evros – and is being used by the Hellenic Police, one of the partners in these projects. One avenue for future research would be to investigate the use of technologies developed and financed through EU-funded research projects - or BMVI as in the case of the REACTION project - not only in Evros but at other borders.

While procedures for data collecting, processing and sharing such data is decided at the national level, they impact directly on the Evros region. The Evros border is a site of (biometric) data collection, especially upon entry and apprehension by the police, while the controversial Centaur and Hyperion projects will be implemented at the Fylakio detention site. Yet collection of biometric data may extend beyond the known processes and databases accounted for in this report. There is limited information, for example, on how data collected through surveillance systems such as the ABSS is stored, processed and shared. Equally, testimonies suggest unofficial and possibly illegal forms of data collection and sharing, such as officers taking photos of PoM with smartphones.

The recent ruling of the HDPA on the civil society complaint against the Centaur and Hyperion projects, civil society advocacy and journalism have highlighted the multiple risks large-scale data collection poses for PoM. Given the extent of data protection and data privacy shortcomings in Greece, risks for PoM are multiplied because of their insecure position and non-recognition of their rights. The invocation of national and border security and the secrecy regime of the area increase the risk for violations. Reflecting the insights of some of the respondents, more research is needed in building knowledge around data collection and processing, including on the applicable legal frameworks and data management and sharing arrangements relating to surveillance technologies.

In contrast to the evidenced use of data collection mechanisms and surveillance technologies, the utilisation of Artificial Intelligence applications is more elusive. There is little evidence to suggest that fully automated processes of recognition, detection, analysis

or prediction are currently employed in Evros. Nevertheless, the lack of available information may be due to the secrecy surrounding such projects despite challenges by civil society, as in the case of the Centaur and Smart Policing. Artificial Intelligence applications for border surveillance are however continuously developed, including in the context of Evros through the BVMI-funded project reaction. In this respect, vigilance – and further research – is required so as to anticipate further potential risks for PoM.

As is often the case with research on surveillance technologies and on EU-funded research projects developing technological capacities for surveillance and border management, secrecy and lack of transparency were serious obstacles. For example, several university departments involved in research projects approached for interviews did not respond or declined an interview. While we submitted several FOI requests concerning EU projects, sensitive documents were refused, including any documents relating to the REACTION project.

Despite some concrete examples, it is currently difficult to assess the full impact of surveillance technologies on PoM in the context of Evros. The inaccessibility and militarisation of the area is one factor, noted also by several respondents. It is difficult to separate the effects of technological interventions from other measures and policing practices. For example, the introduction of both ABSSs coincided with the construction of physical obstacles as well as reinforced policing. However, a further crucial challenge is to differentiate state and media narratives on the capacities and use of technologies from the evidence presence and use of technologies on the ground. For instance, while a sound cannon was demonstrated to the media and widely reported, contrary to some recent claims, there is no evidence it has been operationally used.

Media claims on surveillance technologies in Evros can be vague or inaccurate, relying on government sources who are keen to convey a techno-solutionist approach. While Greek authorities are very keen to stress how border surveillance technologies contribute to their capacity of guarding the border, the limitations of technologies used need to be taken into account. For instance, infrared and thermovision technologies are not without limitations, such as less efficient detection in high temperature and other adverse weather conditions such as fog, rain and snow, or when geographical features might interfere with detection. This can, on the one hand, obscure more significant surveillance infrastructures – such as the sub-system at the Delta of Evros or the impact of far more utilised equipment such as binoculars and portable thermal cameras. On the other, uncritically reproducing narratives of techno-solutionism risks obscuring the agency of PoM and the dynamics of migratory movements. While the Evros border saw the early adoption of surveillance technologies, crossings have never stopped – even if at times they have been displaced.