

EU border agency involved in illegal pushbacks of migrant boats



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Athens, October 26 (RHC)-- Europe's border security agency Frontex has been involved in several illegal "pushbacks" of migrants and refugees crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece, a media investigation has revealed.

The investigation shows "senior Frontex officials know about illegal practices by Greek border guards – and that some of them are themselves implicated in pushbacks," Germany's Der Spiegel said on its website.

Also known as refoulements, "pushbacks" are incidents where refugees or migrants are illegally returned across a border to a country where they could face persecution. Journalists say they have uncovered six cases since April when Frontex units did nothing to stop refugee boats in Greek waters being returned towards Turkey.

A video from a June incident shows a Frontex boat blocking one with refugees on it. A later shot from the same encounter shows it racing across the bow of the boat before leaving the area.

German public broadcaster ARD, journalist collective Lighthouse Reports, investigative platform Bellingcat and Japanese broadcaster TV Asahi were involved in the investigation alongside Der Spiegel. The journalists say they compared “dozens” of videos, also checking satellite imagery and eyewitness accounts from refugees, migrants and Frontex workers.

Der Spiegel reported that more than 600 people from the European border agency equipped with boats, drones and aircraft are deployed in Greece, where many migrants first enter the European Union. It added that Frontex would not comment on the individual cases uncovered by the investigation, but referred to a human rights and non-refoulement code of conduct supposed to bind staff.

Earlier, it posted on Twitter that its actions in support of Greek authorities were “in full respect of fundamental rights and international law”, adding that it “has been in contact with the Greek authorities about some incidents at sea in recent months”.

Athens had launched an “internal inquiry,” it added. The Greek government denies it conducted pushbacks of refugees to Turkey. Frontex officials have publicly claimed that they know nothing about pushbacks by Greek border guards.

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