

Contribution to the SRC 11  
20 September Warsaw, Poland

## Five remarks on border security

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### Introduction

Border security is the classical state arrangement. It's as old as the modern state itself. Along with the military and the civil police, the border guard is perhaps the institution we most associate with the sovereignty of the nation-state. In classical terms, it plays a central role in defending the state against attack from foreign enemies. In the traditional logic of the border guard, the border is considered the last line of defence. Border security in this perspective means confronting the option of an existential threat to the state.

### **Remark 1: Border security is not about defending the state**

This is the image of border security as *defence*. It dates to the Feudal period and to the time of the fortress city. It imagines that the border as a line where we can divide between friend and enemy, legal and illegal, good and bad, us and them. It's the image of *prophylactic* security: security as a barrier or as a wall.

Many of us remain quite nostalgic for this image. It still operates of course in many parts of the world, and this feeds our nostalgia. The border, in these places, is the first line of defence against attacks to the state.

In Europe, however, the border represent a different kind of defence. It is, if you like, the defence of a certain society, namely Europe. That defence is not assured by keeping something out, but rather by making sure that society as we know it is, remain what is.

In Europe, therefore border security is not about defending the 'state', it's about helping to look after society. European border guards aren't soldiers in the traditional sense. They are managers, doing their part to manage society, by helping to manage people and information about people.

### **Remark 2: Border security doesn't take place at the borders**

Since border security is to such a great degree about information, and since this information is generated and stored many places, both inside and outside of Europe, the essential of border security does not even take place at the border.

In pragmatic terms, visa applications and control arrangements are more frequently externalised, taking place far away from the border, most often in the country of origin, sometimes in particular visa delivery agencies.

The effects and consequences of border management also reach far beyond the border, both internally throughout European society, and externally out in the world that relates to Europe.

Moreover, border security is increasingly focused on specific sites in society, sites where people collect, like train stations, bus stations, and city centres.

More importantly, the lives of travellers impacted by border security measures have a range of experiences far beyond the border, origins, ambitions, backgrounds, hopes and fears. All of these extend to other worlds and other places.

### **Remark 3: Border security isn't about the present**

Not only is border security not about what happens at the border, it is not even about what happens *now*.

In the vast majority of cases, border security is not interested in crimes committed or in crimes about to be committed. Border security increasingly takes the form of monitoring the *potential* for *future* crime, for what has not yet happened.

By charting patterns, statistical correlations, a broader notion of threat is transported to the future, more and more a vision of *potential* danger, *potential* crime, *future* criminality.

These methods shift the centre of our attention away from the present and toward the future, future threats, future futures and future events.

### **Remark 4: Smart borders require smart Europeans**

The 'smart border' refers to a certain set of automated surveillance and control functions. The function of the smart border is to enhance efficiency. In its best form it will distinguish seamlessly between 'bona fide' and non-'bona fide' travellers.

How smart are smart borders and how smart are we Europeans who think our borders our smart?

Well, the smartness in the smart borders lies in their ability to bypass the function of the human border guards, in a quicker and less intrusive way. They thus dispense with human judgement and the problems of inaccuracy, monotony and fatigue.

Yet we must be careful not to rush to automation as the best way to categorise humans. We cannot know what will become of the 'bona fide' traveller. What will he do, where will he go, what is his destiny, either by accident or by intention.

On the other hand, as a result of 'smart borders', the 'bona fide' traveller is biometrically traced and tracked, while the manually controlled individual enjoys

arguably a far more nuanced review.

Smart borders, and their use of biometric technologies, both gives the bona fide traveler more freedom while at the same time attaching to him or her tags and identifiers which essentially *hinder* their freedom.

#### **Remark 5: Surveillance ≠ security**

The most important novelty and innovation in border security is of course the widespread consensus that surveillance is the key to security. Border security essentially translates to border surveillance. The garrets and guns that once marketed border crossings are replaced with various types of surveillance arrangements. Seeing is equated with securing.

However this assumption is complex and needs to be looked after carefully. Surveillance and information gathering can be an asset, but not without conditions, not without limitations and regulations.

Surveillance in society has two key aspects here. On the one hand, there is the question of privacy and invasiveness, which is now firmly placed on the agenda. On the other hand, there is a more pragmatic question about the value-added of surveillance measures. In a well-known study of the mammoth London surveillance system, it has now been documented that the presence of surveillance cameras does not reduce the overall amount of crime.

Is there a limit to the security that surveillance and biometric instruments can provide, or is it simply infinite growth, the more surveillance the better? And if there is a limit, how do we know what it is?

#### **Conclusion**

Security in society is like grapes from the vine that ferment and become wine without anything added. Societies generate their own security and must be allowed to develop this natural security without excessive interventions. Technology can help, but the best security measures are the ones society itself provides.

Many people have raised their voices about border security and the technological direction it is taking. They are concerned about the protection of civil rights, privacy and other ethical concerns. These have in part been heard and to some degree addressed.

My approach is a more pragmatic one: I want to ask and answer the question: how can we best do the job of assuring border security at a reasonable cost. This is also a concern shared by more or less everyone involved in security research and innovation.

The response to this pragmatic concern is to go back to basics, asking what kind of security we really want in Europe and what border security has to do with it. If we wish to play a numbers game and call 'security' the reduction of border crossings, then we

are confused indeed.

It has been said that the task of border security is about keeping the bad people out and letting the good people in. Though we have yet to clarify with certainty who the bad guys are, what bad people do, how we know what they will do and how they become bad and good.

We know that the vast majority of clandestine migrants in Europe crossed the border legally. We know that there is no evidence that border surveillance reduces translational criminality. We know that there is no evidence that border control reduces terrorism. We know that the amount of contraband and trafficked humans seized by European border control is insignificant. There is no evidence that terrorism is committed by irregular immigrants. On the contrary, there is clear evidence that the greatest terror threat is posed by European citizens legally living in Europe.

We must not be nostalgic for the good old days when border security meant border defence. Border security is not about keeping the bad guys out and letting the good guys in. It is far more about about making decisions about what a society is, what we expect of society and what society can expect of us.

In other words:

European border security means that Brussels is on the border.

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