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From:	incoming Presidency
To:	Working Party on Frontiers/Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/Liechtenstein)
Subject:	European Integrated Border Management: Preparation of national strategies

Introduction

A resilient Schengen area requires an integrated approach to the management of the external border and well-coordinated policies of both the Member States and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex.

Article 8 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 establishes the Multiannual Strategic Policy Cycle, which sets high-level objectives for European Integrated Border Management (EIBM), including facilitating legitimate border crossings, increasing the efficiency of the Union's return policy, and ensuring the effective prevention of unauthorised border crossings. It also emphasises cooperation with third countries, the swift registration of persons in need of international protection, and the prevention of cross-border crime. The strategy outlines a vision for a strengthened European Border and Coast Guard built on trust, and aiming to protect and connect Europe.

The Communication establishing the Multiannual Strategic Policy for European Integrated Border Management was published in March 2023 ¹, after consultation with the European institutions. It sets out a common framework for action with guidelines for the implementation of effective integrated European border management for the period 2023-2027. The Communication recalls the key principles of the EIBM, which derive directly from the EBCG Regulation and support the political guidelines and strategic priorities.

Within six months of this Communication, Frontex had to prepare a Technical and Operational Strategy (T&O) for EIBM, which was approved by the Frontex Management Board in September 2023. This T&O translates the Commission's political objectives and policy guidelines into a strategic European framework for the implementation of the multi-annual EIBM strategic policy. Member States are now required to translate this T&O strategy into a national strategy by March 2024.

The final phase of the cycle will take the form of an evaluation of the European Commission's implementation of the multi-annual strategic policy. This evaluation will assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the multi-annual strategic policy by Frontex and each Member State in accordance with a coherent, integrated and systematic approach.

The translation process of the EIBM-cycle at national level

The requirements for Member States in translating the T&O into a national integrated border management strategy are manifold. Among other things, Member States should clearly outline the current and future allocation of both human and financial resources, develop a system to monitor progress, and ensure effective implementation of the strategy. In addition, a centralised governance structure should regularly review and update the strategy in order to reflect changes and adaptations to evolving circumstances and to improve its effectiveness. An integrated planning process for border management and return should also be developed, including operational planning, contingency planning and capability development planning processes.

In order to guide Member States in this process, the European Commission organised a webinar on 22 May 2023, to inform Member States' national authorities involved in border management about the implementation process at national level.

¹ 7426/23 +ADD 1.

On this occasion, the European Commission indicated that both the T&O and the national strategies should take into account the Schengen thematic evaluation, be structured around the fifteen components of the EIBM, reflect the political guidance provided by the EU institutions, and be in line with the Multi-annual Financial Framework. The national priorities should also be translated into concrete action plans.

Exchange of views between the Member States

The process of organising and drafting a national strategy for Integrated Border Management poses complex challenges and requires constant adaptation and close cooperation between the competent national authorities.

The Belgian Presidency believes that an exchange of best practices among Member States on the challenges encountered during the drafting process could be beneficial for all.

Discussing these issues could help ensure the successful transposition of the Technical and Operational Strategy into national Integrated Border Management strategies and achieve a fully effective European Integrated Border Management.

We would therefore invite delegations to exchange views on the following issues:

- 1. What are the best practices that were set up and identified for the writing of your national strategy? What challenges and areas of concern will be carried over to the next cycle?*
- 2. How can Member States ensure effective collaboration and coordination among different national agencies involved in border management during the development of the strategy, as well as during the entire cycle?*

What governance structures were set up to ensure the implementation and follow-up of the strategies? How will they facilitate cooperation and information-sharing with the governance model at European level?

Delegations are invited to send their written comments to the Presidency be2024.frontiers@ibz.be and the Council Secretariat frontiers@consilium.europa.eu.