

Summary

The beginning of 2021 marked five years since the Turkey deal was concluded between the EU and Turkey. Although the degrading conditions in the detention camps on the Greek islands and the violence on the Greek-Turkish border have regularly been in the news over the past year, the horrific consequences of this deal outside Europe are often less visible. The Turkey deal is not unique: the European Union (EU) and European member states have made many agreements with countries outside Europe to increase border control and already stop migration in those countries. This phenomenon, also known as border externalisation, has become one of the most important pillars of migration policy for European countries. This is also the case for the Netherlands.

In two decades migration agreements to increase border security and to facilitate the deportation of refugees have become increasingly important to the Netherlands. With horrific consequences: migration routes are becoming more dangerous, refugees are increasingly faced with human rights violations, internal repression and dictatorships are reinforced and development and stability in countries around Europe are undermined. All this with one goal: to stop migration before it can reach Europe. There is one clear winner: the arms industry that benefits by providing the means for increasing border security in third countries.

This report examines the role of the Dutch government and the Dutch arms industry in border externalisation policies. Although the Netherlands is not one of the most important players at the European level, the Dutch government is taking an increasingly active role in border externalisation policies. This report will show that:

- Border externalisation policies have increasingly become part of the core of Dutch foreign policy over the past twenty years. Economic, cultural and development cooperation relations are all used as leverage to negotiate migration deals. Because the external migration policy is reflected in many cases, various ministries and agencies are involved.

- Dutch foreign policy is increasingly adapted to regions that are important for migration. Especially since 2017 development cooperation policy, the missions network and military missions have increasingly focused on important migration countries. For example, development cooperation ties with countries outside focus regions for migration are being phased out, embassies are being opened in priority migration countries and more and more military missions are being carried out to combat irregular migration.

- The Netherlands promotes the idea of "more is more" and "less is less" at an international level. This means that third countries get more development cooperation if they cooperate well in migration policy, while countries that do not cooperate well have their aid cut. The Netherlands is also actively applying this idea: in 2012 Ghana was cut for € 10 million in development cooperation because the country did not cooperate well on deportations.

- During the EU Presidency in 2016, the Netherlands played an important role in the realization of the Turkey deal. After the conclusion of the Turkey deal, it has been used as a model for Dutch external migration policy. The government wants to make more deals with countries to return migrants who are "safe" in the third country without a full asylum procedure.

- Dutch policy mainly focuses on securing deportation agreements and reception in the region. Financing "voluntary return projects" is also an important pillar, but the degree of "voluntariness" of these projects is often questionable. In addition, projects to increase border security of third countries are playing an increasingly important role.

- Budgets for increasing border security in third countries continue to rise. Where in 2009 only € 2.3 million went to migration management projects in third countries, this tripled to € 6 million in 2018. This is in addition to increasing contributions to European funds for border externalisation.

- Defense is increasingly used to train border guards in third countries. The Royal Netherlands Marechaussee (KMar) in particular makes an important contribution to this by training Nigerian border guards, the Libyan coast guard and the Lebanese army.

- International organizations earn a lot of money from implementing border security capacity building projects. These organizations are not bound by human rights treaties, play an important ideological role in policy formulation and steer border policy in the direction of increasing border security.

- Projects are carried out with Dutch money and manpower that involve collaboration with controversial partners. For example, militias in Libya are indirectly reinforced, the KMar trains the army in Lebanon and Dutch officials worked with officials of the al-Bashir dictatorship of Sudan. In this way security forces of repressive regimes are strengthened and authoritarian governments are legitimised.

- The Sahel is becoming an increasingly important region for the Netherlands in terms of migration cooperation. With disastrous consequences: local economies have collapsed, security forces that violate human rights are being reinforced and political instability in countries is increasing. The Southern Sahara has become the world's deadliest migration route.

- The Dutch arms industry makes a profit by selling border security equipment to third countries to stop refugees. Ship builder Damen supplies patrol vessels to various coast guards and navies, Thales exports radar and communication systems for the navy to Egypt, Morocco and Algeria and the biometrics company Gemalto supplies biometric passports around the world.

This report examines the various aspects of the Dutch role in border externalization. The first part analyses the development of Dutch border externalisation policies and thus shows the growing importance of this phenomenon in Dutch policy. The second chapter sheds light on the money flows that go to border externalisation projects and main actors for this policy. The third chapter zooms in on the four focus regions for Dutch external migration policy and discusses the many different projects that are carried out with Dutch money and manpower. The report ends with an overview of the Dutch arms companies that earn money from selling border security equipment to third countries.

It is clear that the single-minded focus of the Netherlands and the EU on stepping up border security has disastrous consequences. Instead of focusing at all costs on stopping migrants, the Netherlands should be concerned with creating safe and regular access routes to Europe, resettling refugees trapped in inhumane conditions in Greece, Lebanon and Libya and actually tackling the root causes of migration. Not by reception in the region and strengthening security forces in third countries, but by combating global inequality, climate destruction and exploitation as well as ending arms exports, military interventions and neo-colonial trade agreements. Only in these ways can human lives be effectively saved and violence against refugees ended.