

Subject: Request for Information / PAD-2023-00223

From: Press <Press@frontex.europa.eu>

Date: 9/8/2023, 4:06 μ.μ.

To: "e.chelioudakis@homodigitalis.gr" <e.chelioudakis@homodigitalis.gr>

CC: Press <Press@frontex.europa.eu>

Dear Eleftherios,

This is a reply to your request for information falling under PAD-2023-00223:

1) Did drones and/or satellites of EUROSUR or any other border monitoring system, conducted patrols/ were under operation in the area in which this trawler was travelling (south of Libya to Italy) in the Mediterranean sea from 9/6 to 13/6?

With the introduction of the 2019 European Border and Coast Guard Regulation and subsequent repeal of the 2013 EUROSUR regulation, EUROSUR has become an integrated framework for the exchange of information and operational cooperation within the European Border and Coast Guard and cannot be considered a “system” any longer. The EUROSUR integrated framework itself is composed of several components, such as the National Coordination Centres; the European, National and Specific Situational Pictures as well as EUROSUR Fusion Services. The reporting obligations for both, the Agency and Member States are provided for in the respective articles of the European Border and Coast Guard regulation as well as in the 2021 Commission Implementing Regulation on the EUROSUR situational pictures. The objectives of EUROSUR are to improve situational awareness and to increase reaction capability for the purposes of border management, including the detection, prevention and combating of illegal immigration and cross-border crime and – as correctly pointed out - contributing to ensuring the protection and saving the lives of migrants. To this end, the National Coordination Centres have a wide area of responsibilities for coordination with other national competent authorities and the Agency supports with EUROSUR Fusion Services based on the common application of surveillance tools and inter-agency cooperation at Union level. EUROSUR Fusion Services should provide the Member States and the Agency with value-added information services related to European integrated border management. It is important to mention that Frontex shall provide a National Coordination Centre, at its request, with information on the external borders of the Member State to which it belongs and on the pre-frontier area. The Agency however may use on its own initiative, these surveillance tools only for collecting information on the pre-frontier area.

When it comes to provision of EUROSUR Fusion Services for its own purposes, the Agency applies risk analysis or reacts to ongoing situations as well as information received. EUROSUR Fusion Services have contributed to saving lives at sea in the past and has proven to enhance situational awareness and reaction capabilities at the external border and the pre-frontier areas, directly contributing to the rescue of migrants’ lives by informing the competent authorities and providing situational awareness. Currently, Frontex is supporting Joint Operations and pre-frontier surveillance (under EUROSUR Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance) with a number of aerial assets. This year, until mid-July 2023, 890 flight missions were performed by Frontex Surveillance Aircrafts which identified 816 objects, among others, migrant boats, vessels of interest, empty boats, drug/ goods smuggling boats and contributed to rescuing 35,923 migrants. Unfortunately, the technical capabilities available cannot guarantee a gap-less surveillance also taking the size of the Mediterranean Sea which is approximately 2,500,000 km².

2) Was Frontex aware of the existence of this vessel before Tuesday 13/6, by the EUROSUR or

other border monitoring systems capabilities?

Frontex was providing several EUROSUR Fusion services during the time of this tragedy including satellite-based coastal monitoring at the North African shores (activated by the Agency) and aerial surveillance as requested by the Hellenic authorities. Satellite imagery based from the assumed area of departure covering the days around the tragedy did not reveal the presence or absence of this particular vessel. Earth Observation (EO)-satellite based EUROSUR Fusion Services use data coming from sensors (electro-optical and Synthetic Aperture Radar-SAR) mounted on satellites, that are orbiting around the Earth, to provide monitoring of areas of interest, identified through risk analysis or available information. These EO capabilities do not offer the possibility to have 24/7 surveillance of an area and can only be applied over small areas on the surface of the Earth. The limitations of the services derive from the limitations of the currently available satellite technology.

The aerial surveillance capabilities provided by Frontex in the Central Mediterranean Sea according to requests submitted by the Member States performed several missions in that area during the reference period and covering partially the potential route of the fishing vessel involved in that tragic event. These aerial assets included fixed wing aircraft and remotely piloted aircraft. On 13 June (09:47UTC), a Frontex fixed wing aircraft operating under Joint Operation Poseidon Sea detected the fishing vessel inside the Greek search and rescue region in international waters. Frontex immediately informed the Greek and Italian authorities and kept monitoring the vessel until it ran out of fuel and had to return to base. Furthermore, a Remotely Piloted Aircraft System, which was not flying at that time, was offered to provide additional support under the EUROSUR integrated framework.

2a) If Frontex was aware, when did it inform the Greek and Italian coast guards about the situation, as obliged by the EUROSUR regulation, so that further monitoring of the vessel could take place, and rescue operations could be conducted?

As explained before, the vessel was only detected by a Frontex asset on 13 June (09:47UTC).

2b) If Frontex was not aware, what are the reasons that led to the failure of the EUROSUR system, which presents itself as a solid solution for monitoring EU external borders in the Mediterranean region, and protecting human lives, leading to this tragic and deadly shipwreck.

As mentioned before, the Hellenic and Italian competent authorities were informed immediately after detecting this vessel.

Kind regards,
Frontex Press Office

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