Inside Out and Outside in:

COVID-19 and the reconfiguration of Europe's external border controls

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Abstract

The extension of border controls beyond Europe's territory to regulate the flows of would-be migrants is a popular—and highly controversial—policy approach adopted by European governments. The present paper examines recent developments characterizing the externalization of border management in Europe, paying particular attention to the changes that have occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This represents a time when mobility has been severely restricted in most of Europe (and the rest of the world). The aim is to map the impact of the pandemic on relevant "externalizing" policy instruments (e.g., visas, extra-territorial patrolling and surveillance, external processing of asylum claims, and offshore detention of migrants) and to assess their future trajectories. The paper shows that during the pandemic, the externalization of border controls has expanded and adapted to the new conditions. As a result, some of the key dynamics that define this policy arrangement have been recreated internally, a phenomenon referred to here as the "internalization of externalized border controls."

Keywords: border, border controls, Europe, COVID-19, externalization

Introduction

The management of population flows has historically taken different forms, depending on the type of individuals whose movement needed to be regulated, the agency in charge of managing the flows, and the territorial scope of the measures. To control population flows, national authorities—especially those of countries or regions that have been favored destinations for migrants or other travelers—have traditionally targeted non-residents arriving at their borders. The measures that have been introduced include the creation of dedicated entry points, passport checks at entry, and the monitoring of land and sea borders. Since the 1990s, governments around the world have increased their efforts to push these controls further away from their territorial borders, in order to better managing growing migratory pressures and preventing unwanted migrants from starting their journey (Zaiotti 2016; McNamara 2013; Müller and Slominski 2020). The externalization of border management consists of policy tools such visas (Infantino 2019; Laube 2019), extra-

territorial patrolling and surveillance (Dijstelbloem et al. 2017), external processing of asylum claims (Frelick et al. 2016), and offshore detention of migrants (Flynn 2014). Over time, these practices have expanded and become more sophisticated, with greater resources being allocated to them and to the extensive deployment of technology.

Migration pressures and security considerations have been the driving forces behind the move to externalize border checks. While these factors are still present and inform current border control practices in Europe and elsewhere, the context in which these policies are implemented has changed with the emergence of the coronavirus and the pandemic it has engendered. The spread of this infectious disease in 2020 is considered the most serious health-related global crisis since the Spanish influenza in the aftermath of WW1.[1] The virus has infected millions of people around the world, increased mortality rates, and pushed to the limits the ability of healthcare systems—even in advanced economies—to cope with the surge in the number of cases. One of the central pillars of the response encouraged by public officials at national and international levels has been an emphasis on social distancing to reduce the rate of infection among the population. This principle has been translated into public policy measures that have reduced citizens' mobility, both within and across borders.

While preliminary analyses of the impact of the pandemic on borders at the national and sub-national level have been carried out (see e.g., Radil et al. 2020; Shachar 2020; Kenwick and Simmons 2020; Wolff et al. 2020), less attention has been paid to measures beyond these territorial boundaries. The present paper seeks to address this gap by examining the effects of the pandemic on key aspects that define externalized border control as a distinct policy domain. These features include the territorial scope of the controls and the types of border checks deployed. In considering developments characterizing the European case, the paper shows that during the height of the pandemic (March 2020 to March 2021), the trends toward reliance on the externalization of border controls have continued. However, this policy arrangement has been adapted to the new conditions, and the changes have led to the reconfiguration of border controls more generally. One of the consequences of this reconfiguration is that some of the key dynamics that define externalized border controls have been recreated internally (i.e., within national, or in the case of

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[1] Regarding the nexus between disease, security, and borders in a historical perspective, see Bashford 2006.

Europe, continental borders); a phenomenon referred to here as the "internalization of externalized border controls."

The paper is organized as follows. The first section examines the impact of the pandemic on border control policies in Europe. The second section turns to the dynamics of externalization and internalization that have characterized the border control domain in three policy areas: travel documents; monitoring and surveillance of mobility; detention and confinement. The concluding section considers the legacy of the pandemic on border control in Europe, highlighting the long-term effects of the policies introduced in this period.

From Inside Out to Outside In: Externalized Border Control Reconfigured

The most visible changes brought about by the pandemic with regard to externalized border controls involve the territorial scope of the new measures introduced in Europe during the emergency.[2] In pre-coronavirus times, externalized border controls focused primarily on nations deemed sources of economically-driven migration, especially countries in Africa, South America, and South Asia. Since the pandemic hit, the scope of these measures has broadened to become global and now includes more economically advanced countries with prior limited restrictions. A related trend has been the de-linking of the connection between travel restrictions and the nationality of travelers. Public authorities have paid more attention to travelers' residence for the purposes of risk assessment and making travel policies. The European Union (EU) and its member states adopted an expansive geographical approach when introducing new anti-coronavirus travel measures in the early stages of the pandemic. In March 2020, the European Council and the European Commission adopted a common European approach to restrict non-essential travel to the EU for an initial period of thirty days with the aim of containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19. This policy applied especially to individuals who had any COVID-19 related symptoms or had been previously exposed to the infection and were therefore considered a threat to public health in the EU.

In parallel with the reconfiguration and expansion of border controls beyond Europe, another phenomenon emerging at the height of the pandemic has been the adoption of some of these measures *within* Europe. New measures affecting cross-border mobility have been deployed

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[2] With regard to the rescaling of borders in the context of externalization, see Cobarrubias 2020.

at continental, national, and sub-national levels. One of the first decisions taken by European countries has been the reintroduction of checks at internal borders within Europe (Heinikoski 2020). Since the 1990s, European countries have committed to maintaining an area of free travel across the region. According to the rules of the Schengen border regime, the policy arrangement that made the idea of a border-free Europe possible, the re-imposition of internal border controls is accepted only in exceptional circumstances. Because the COVID-19 pandemic falls into this category, European governments were therefore justified in their actions. However, the Schengen border regime stipulates that decisions to re-imposition border controls need to be proportional and coordinated with the European Commission and other member states. During the course of the pandemic, however, most member states introduced these measures unilaterally and adopted an expansive interpretation of the Schengen rules to determine their scope and duration (Wollf et al. 2020). It should also be noted that the European Commission and other EU institutions took a more cautious stance regarding border restrictions within the Schengen area, a reflection of EU commitment to upholding the principles of freedom of movement that is at the core of the European project. The EU has also tried to increase coordination among member states in this policy domain. Later in 2020, for instance, the European Centre for Disease Control (the EU agency in charge of managing infectious diseases) created a color-coded map that traces the rate of infections across the continent. This visual guide has subsequently been used by national governments to determine the level of access and mobility across the continent. European governments agreed to participate in this system to maintain Europe's freedom of movement, which could otherwise be undermined by individual countries' unilateral actions.[3] In this map, the borders separating different color-coded areas are not necessarily consistent with national ones, as some sub-national entities' rates of infection may differ within a country; as a result, they may be required to enforce different types of restrictions on citizens' mobility.

In the reconfiguration of border controls that the pandemic brought about, the territorial shape of these practices has also changed. New configurations have emerged, such as the "travel zone," "corridor," and "bubble" (Whiting 2020). These arrangements represent an instance of "excised territories" (Maillet et al. 2018) carved out of existing spatial configurations within or

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[3] European Centre for Disease Control, *Maps in support of the Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the EU/EEA and the UK*. Available at https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/covid-19/situation-updates/weekly-maps-coordinated -restriction-free-movement

between jurisdictions; whether international (e.g., the corridor linking Spain's Balearic Islands with selected European countries, or the "travel bubble" among Baltic states) or sub-national (e.g., the twinning of border regions within Europe with similar color codes, or outside Europe, Canada's "Atlantic bubble," which includes three contiguous provinces in the East of the country). While the reliance on "corridors" indicates the instrumental nature of these arrangements (as spaces connecting one location to another), the use of "bubbles" implies a more explicitly social dimension. As a sociological term, "bubble" describes the relationships between the outside world and an individual or group. "Social bubbles" evoke a sense of coziness, predictability, and protection, but also malleability and flexibility, as they can expand or shrink depending on the circumstances. When applied to a particular geographical area, this phenomenon is referred to as a "tourist bubble": a site where tourists are shielded from the locals (completely or in part) to maintain a sense of homeliness or prevent them from disturbing the residents (Jacobsen 2003). In the case of the current pandemic, however, the bubble represents an uncanny reversal of its original meaning. Indeed, pandemic bubbles do not protect tourists from locals. Instead, these arrangements shield the locals from everybody else. They also evoke some of the negative connotations of social bubbles, specifically the insularity that the discouragement of interactions with people with different opinions and narrow-mindedness entails—the type of dynamics encapsulated in the "echo chamber effect" on social media (Yusuf at al. 2014). They also evoke hostility against those who breach a bubble, as attested by the string of recent "license-shaming" incidents against non-local drivers in some of these bubbles. The tracking of incomers also creates a sense of siege mentality, even panic. The sense of lightness that should accompany the term "bubble" seems to be lost in the metaphor. Indeed, terms such as "perimeter" or "fence" might be more apt to describe these phenomena.

Strictly Pandemic: Externalized Border Controls Repurposed

As noted above, in recent times, European governments have deployed a wide array of policy measures that fall under the category of externalized border controls. These practices have varied depending on the type of approach used to manage migratory flows, ranging from monitoring to filtering, stopping and prevention. National authorities have typically deployed externalized border control initiatives that combine all these modalities. The same thing has happened during the pandemic. Responses to the current emergency, however, have relied more heavily on the more

restrictive method: stopping migratory flows at the source. Another direct effect of the pandemic on externalized border controls has been a change in the primary justification for deploying these policies. Until recently, the externalization of border control has been justified in terms of preventing economic migration and/or on security grounds. The main reason for the continuing application or expansion of border control measures during the pandemic is to limit entry due to health concerns (Bashford 2006). Indeed, economic considerations have decreased their "pull" factor in migration patterns, as economic opportunities (coupled with limited access) have dwindled in Europe and other traditional countries of immigration. These measures have also been justified in terms of the emergency nature of the current situation. By turning into a "crisis" mode of policymaking, decisions on new and potentially controversial measures have become speedier and less constrained. The emergency argument represents a rehashing of the one advanced during the so-called "refugee crisis" in Europe in 2015–16 that led to the tightening and expansion of border controls beyond Europe (Nedergaard 2019). The scope of the pandemic, which affects not just migrants but European citizens as well, has meant that the crisis mode of policymaking adopted by European governments has become more extensive and invasive than in the past, affecting various policy domains, including border control, both within Europe and outside (Beirens 2020).

The repurposing of external border control and their expansion within the continent that occurred during the pandemic is apparent in the changes that the EU and its member states have implemented since early 2020. The most notable of these changes have affected the regulation of international and domestic travel, the external processing of asylum, offshore patrolling, and extra-territorial detention. These developments are examined in the following sections.

Thicker paper walls: Visas and travel requirements during the pandemic

Visas are documents that provide permission for non-residents to enter a country. Typically, a visa is processed prior to a traveler's arrival at the border, entailing background security checks and interviews at consulates. Even when no visa is formally needed, some upstream controls are routinely performed. During the pandemic, European countries have severely restricted access to visas for incoming travelers, and further expanded the necessary requirements to obtain them. As noted, in March 2020, the EU Commission recommended that member states enforce a temporary

travel ban on third-country nationals entering the Schengen area. This travel ban also involved the cessation of visa processing and issuance by EU consulates and embassies. In June 2020, the commission recommended that member states resume synchronized visa operations, particularly because the travel ban and travel restrictions were slowly being lifted in member states. In parallel, the EU introduced a list (regularly updated) of countries from which citizens could enter without restrictions, based on the local infection rates. The EU Commission also called for a harmonized approach to visa operations, involving a uniform way of processing visa applications in all EU consulates and embassies (European Commission 2020). In terms of requirements, the most visible addition has been a coronavirus test as a precondition for access, which has rendered the visa process more cumbersome and expensive (ibid). Mobility restrictions in countries of origin have also made the visa application process more challenging, as access to consular facilities has become more limited. New health regulations within consulates and embassies have also affected the process of obtaining a visa. Applicants are expected to maintain physical distancing inside the embassy, come to their appointment with a mask and a pen, and are required to submit to a temperature check (ibid). After an applicant submits their application file, the embassy staff store it for 48 hours before it is handled. To counter these problems, EU member states have moved some steps of the application online. Visa processing and issuing times, however, have become longer because of the new rules and restrictions.

Changes to practices related to travel documentation have not only involved inbound travel. Indeed, a notable development stemming from the pandemic is the introduction of access permit requirements issued to residents in various European countries, reminiscent of the "safe conduct" travel documents issued during conflicts or in earlier epidemics (see for instance, Italy's *autocertificatione per gli spostamenti* and France's *attestation de déplacement dérogatoire*). These documents have been introduced to allow citizens' mobility during lockdowns, either to move across sub-national borders, or in some circumstances, within cities or neighborhoods, and offered only in exceptional circumstances.

The external processing of asylum and Europe's "refugee camps"

In pre-pandemic times, European governments had sought to actively externalize asylum policies to prevent third-country nationals from applying for refugee status within their territories. One of the centerpieces of this approach is the so-called "safe country of asylum" policy (Kneebone 2008).

The concept of "safe country of asylum" is the key component of the Dublin Convention, which European countries agreed on in the 1990s (Bartel et al. 2020). According to this convention, if an individual applies for asylum after traveling through a country that is party to the UN Convention relating to the status of refugees, and thus considered to be "safe," he or she would be returned to that country—whether within or outside the EU—to file his or her application. The Dublin Convention had been placed under strain because of the 2015–16 refugee crisis, pitting countries around Europe's external borders—which had to deal with migratory flows head-on—against those further afield in the continent (Marx 2019). The pandemic has temporarily frozen these ongoing tensions. One of the side effects of the spread of COVID-19 was a sharp decline in the number of asylum applicants in the first part of 2020 (Doliwa-Klepacka and Zdanowicz 2020). In addition to reduced access due to the travel restrictions imposed on all Europe-bound travelers, asylum seekers also had to face the closures of asylum application centers across the continent. The Federal Office for Foreign Affairs and Asylum (BFA) in Austria, for instance, closed both its branch offices and initial reception centers soon after the country-imposed travel restrictions. Similarly, the Greek Asylum Service, the Directorate of Immigration in Luxembourg, the Asylum and Refugee Office in Spain, and the Office for Foreigners in Poland suspended in-person services (EASO 2020). Even after asylum reception centers started reopening, they have only offered limited services for individual applicants (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020).

In parallel, and as a corollary measure to the safe country of asylum arrangement, European countries have also pushed to establish asylum processing facilities beyond or at Europe's external borders. The purpose is to compel migrants to submit asylum claims before they reach their final destination. European officials first began suggesting the offshoring of asylum procedures in the 1980s (Flynn 2014, 23). Since then, numerous calls for their deployment have been made, but their full implementation has never materialized. Hosting states have been reluctant to accept these arrangements on political and economic grounds. In turn, human rights advocates in Europe have been vocally opposed to the idea, since these facilities would not provide adequate legal protection to asylum seekers, and the monitoring of abuses would be limited. A successful attempt to create such an arrangement stems from the Turkey-EU agreement signed in 2016 at the height of the refugee crisis. This agreement sought to address irregular migration (mostly Syrian asylum seekers) from Turkey to Europe. For this purpose, Turkey agreed to accept the return of irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands, and committed to preventing further

population outflows. In return, the EU agreed to accept an equal number of resettled migrants from Turkey, provide a path for further liberation of visas for Turkish citizens, and provide funding to support refugees in Turkey. The agreement recently came under scrutiny, as Turkey threatened to unravel it if the EU did not provide additional support to the Turkish authorities. To cope with the ongoing migratory pressure during the refugee crisis, the EU had also introduced so-called "Reception and Identification Centres" or "hotspots" at its external borders. In these facilities, EU agencies (the European Asylum Support Office, Frontex , Europol, and Eurojust) collaborate with the authorities of frontline EU member states to identify, register, and fingerprint incoming migrants (European Commission 2015). Italy and Greece were the first two EU member states to implement the hotspot approach. The creation of these centers signaled a trend toward the internalization of externalized border controls, as part of the processing of migrants is relocated within European territorial boundaries but away from the "mainland." With the pandemic, this trend is deepening. As a result of the health-related restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, these facilities indeed look more and more like refugee camps in terms of the level of access, mobility, and living conditions of their residents. This was the case for the most notorious "hotspot": the (now closed) Moria Reception and Identification Centre (RICM) on the Greek island of Lesbos. In the pre-pandemic context, once asylum-seeking migrants had crossed the sea border into Greek waters, they were usually rescued at sea by NGOs or international or Greek border officials. They were then registered at the Moria reception center, stating that they were seeking asylum in Greece. After being registered, and if there was free space, individuals were assigned a place at the RICM. If the center was full, individuals were housed in a tent in an area surrounding the center. Long waiting times and overcrowding quickly became problems (Jauhiainen 2020, 269), and with COVID-19 the situation further deteriorated. Asylum seekers were effectively stranded in the camp with the threat of the rapid spread of the virus among inhabitants. After the first COVID-19 case was identified among the inhabitants of Lesbos, international NGOs urged Greek authorities to evacuate the RICM and other overcrowded asylum reception centers (Médecins Sans Frontiers 2020). As a result, the Greek authorities launched a plan to relocate the most vulnerable asylum seekers to the mainland to reduce the risk of a virus outbreak (Jauhiainen 2020, 270). However, the plan was not realized. Some of the Moria camps residents were instead flown to Germany and other EU member states. The Greek authorities also implemented a mandatory fourteen-day quarantine period for individuals who had been potentially exposed to COVID-19. In addition, on

19 March 2020, access to the RICM was restricted to asylum seekers living in the center and the permanent staff working there. Due to an extensive fire that damaged the facility, in September 2020 the Moria camp was closed, and its 13,000 residents eventually moved to a new location on Lesbos. The pandemic has therefore not pushed away Europe's refugee camps; instead, it has rendered them more isolated, fortified, and dangerous.

Quarantines unbound: From external detention to domestic confinement

The external processing of asylum is closely linked to another type of externalizing instrument: offshore detention. Since asylum seekers are either forced to enter the proposed processing centers or prevented from leaving them before their claims are processed, these facilities can be considered de facto prisons (Noll 2003). Detention centers for migrants are typically located in transit countries, although other arrangements have been devised.[4] European governments have considered the offshoring option for detention and delegated to transit country governments to build and manage centers for irregular migrants. Some of these efforts date back to the late 1990s, but the practice has become more widespread since the millennium. For example, in 2002, with the financial support of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, the Mauritanian government created a detention center for irregular migrants in the city of Nouadhibou. Similar facilities have sprung up in other locations. As of 2019, for instance, Turkey reported a detention capacity of 20,000 individuals in its several detention centers. While some of these initially operated as Reception and Accommodation Centers for international protection under EU funding, they now operate as Removal Centers (Asylum in Europe 2020). The Libyan government's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) have set up detention facilities for Europe-bound or returned migrants that have been estimated to house between 3,000 and 5,000 individuals (ibid).

Another significant development has been the increasing cooperation between national governments and international organizations in the offshore detention business. The European Union, for example, has provided funds to the International Organization for Migration to support detention efforts in Ukraine. The EU has also offered financial assistance for the creation and management of detention facilities within the framework of the "Twinning" program; an initiative

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[4] An interesting example is the category of the "offshore excised person," namely a detainee held in an airport zone where national legislation does not apply.

in which EU states partner with governments in Europe's neighborhood to strengthen local administrative and bureaucratic capacity.

The extra-territorial detention of migrants has continued during the pandemic. One of the most immediate effects of the global spread of the virus has been the recurrence of outbreaks in detention facilities outside Europe, forcing local authorities to take precautionary measures, and in some circumstances allowing detainees to leave (InfoMigrants 2020). Because of their dire situation, the UN has called for the closure of these detention centers (Arab Weekly 2020). The pandemic has had another effect on the confinement of migrants. Because of the fear of the spread of the disease on the continent and the closure of some European ports, Southern European countries have used boats and ships to quarantine migrants and asylum seekers who tested positive for the virus. In September 2020, for instance, migrants from the Italian island of Lampedusa were transferred to the quarantine ship *Rhapsody*, which was anchored off the port of Palermo. It was reported that 868 migrants were quarantined on the ship, with only members of the Red Cross and personnel from the shipping company onboard (InfoMigrants 2020). Similarly, the Maltese government has used the ship MV *Galaxy*, which can accommodate 350 quarantining migrants, and the Greek government's *Blue Star* was used to accommodate thousands of asylum seekers after the Lesbos detention center was set on fire (Ibid). Vessels in the Mediterranean have become, therefore, de facto floating detention centers.

Forced confinement due to COVID-19 has not been restricted to migrants on boats. Indeed, this practice has been expanded to include incoming visitors and local residents in Europe who have tested positive for the virus. These measures are accompanied by monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for violations, carried out by law enforcement agencies in EU member states. These are the principles behind Italy's *contenimento rafforzato* (reinforced containment), a form of de facto domestic confinement, and similar policies adopted by European countries since March 2020. A practice that was originally intended to keep migrants far away from Europe is now taking over the entire continent.

From extra-territorial to intra-territorial patrolling and surveillance

Another area of externalized border controls that has been affected by the pandemic is that of extra-territorial patrolling and surveillance, typically applied to maritime borders. Patrolling coastlines with naval or coastguard ships is a core security function for states. Although in some

circumstances (e.g., during times of war or search and rescue operations) states do conduct patrolling exercises beyond their sovereign boundaries, the presence of vessels on the high seas with the intended purpose of intercepting migrant boats is a relatively new phenomenon (Taylor 2011, 10; Tondini 2012, 59–60). Patrolling and rescue operations around Europe's coastlines have become commonplace, and the frontline states of Spain and Italy have been among the most active in maritime interdiction. Spain's *Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior* (SIVE), one of the first of this kind in Europe (it became operational in 2002), employs radar and surveillance cameras to detect incoming vessels and intercept them if suspected to be carrying irregular migrants (Casas-Cortes et al. 2014). Since its creation, the EU border agency Frontex has taken an active role in offshore operations led by EU member states. The agency has coordinated joint patrols by European maritime forces along the Mediterranean and West African coasts, and in some cases, has taken a more operational role. In recent times, private vessels managed by non-governmental organizations have become involved in rescue operations in the Mediterranean (Bloom 2015). Their activities have taken place alongside those of Southern European countries' official vessels. The relationship between national coastguards and NGOs has been at times tense, as the former see the latter as impinging on their turf and facilitating irregular migration.

With the pandemic, the practice of coastguard and NGO vessels patrolling and rescuing migrants in the high seas around Europe's maritime borders has continued. The EU has also continued to provide the state authorities in countries of transit with assistance, training, and speedboats to ensure that migrants trying to seek asylum in Europe are intercepted at sea and are returned. Libya has been the main recipient of this support. According to Amnesty International, 8435 of the 60,000 men, women, and children who had been captured at sea were disembarked in Libya by the EU-supported Libyan Coast Guard between 1 January and 14 September 2020 alone (Amnesty International 2020). The pandemic has also brought new challenges and controversies surrounding extra-territorial patrolling and rescuing. On 7 April 2020, Italy officially declared its ports "unsafe" for the disembarkation of migrants rescued at sea because of the threat of contagion (World Politics Review 2020). This decision came in part as a response to what Italian authorities perceived as irresponsible actions by NGO vessels that threatened its authority. The day before the port closures, the German NGO ship *Sea-Eye* had in fact rescued 150 migrants at sea off the coast of Libya. The fraught relationship with national authorities had therefore worsened in the period. At the same time, the pandemic has also restricted the activities of NGOs in the area. *Sea-Eye* was

the only rescue ship carrying out sea patrols in the Mediterranean in April 2020 (Human Rights Watch 2020). Since then, other NGOs have returned to the area, but in lower numbers than before. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has also been involved in rescue operations. In the case of its intervention for a capsized boat on September 22, 2020, the IOM handed over the rescued migrants to the Libyan coast guard, who took them to the Zliten detention center in Tripoli.

During the pandemic, authorities from EU member states have also continued the controversial practice of "pushbacks," whereby migrants and asylum seekers are forcibly returned to their country of departure before they reach Europe's borders (Guttentag 2020). In parallel with the decision to suspend asylum-seeking procedures within its territory, the Greek authorities actively conducted pushbacks at land and sea borders (Jauhiainen 2020, 267). These practices have been complemented with the expulsion of asylum seekers from the mainland. These migrants were then placed in centers before their removal from Greece. Other EU countries have also exercised the forceful removal of irregular immigrants from their territories. For example, Hungarian authorities carried out 75 removals to third countries and Croatian authorities forcefully returned 41 people to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Iraq (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2020).

As has been the case for other types of externalized border practices, the pandemic has had as an unintended consequence the expansion of monitoring and surveillance practices inside Europe. Police officers have been deployed to enforce restrictions on mobility within cities and movement between sub-national territories. Citizens are also monitored through contract tracing methods introduced to control the pandemic. Tools employed for this purpose include electronic tracking devices (e.g., contact tracing apps) or more traditional means (e.g., telephone calls). The introduction of these devices, and more generally, the monitoring and policing of mobility has raised serious questions about citizens and migrants' rights and the potential negative implications of governmental overreach in times of crisis. These issues have become more prominent given the extended nature of the current emergency.

Conclusion: Border Controls in a Post-Pandemic Europe

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching repercussions on the cross-border mobility of citizens, residents and migrants in Europe. Practices that before the pandemic governments had adopted to restrict access to migrants before they reached their borders have been expanded during the emergency, and, in some cases, applied within national territories. The restrictive policy measures have undermined what for European citizens was the taken-for-granted right to move freely within one's country and across the continent. These measures have also reduced the ability of non-European citizens to travel, seek protection or a better life in the Old Continent. Borders, as the primary locus where mobility at the international level is regulated, have become more visible and "thick." Looking ahead, the question is whether the current disruption is only a temporary blip in these long-term trends or whether its impact will be long-lasting. The fate of cross-border mobility is especially important for Europe since "freedom of movement" is one of the key pillars of the continent's integration project. As noted, one of the most direct effects of the pandemic has been to alter the 'normal' policy-making mode that European governments rely upon to manage the continent's borders. The option to reintroduce internal border controls has been selected sparingly and for short periods in the past. The migratory pressure on European borders that led to the 'refugee crisis' reversed this trend. The extensive and prolonged reintroduction of internal border controls was justified in terms of the emergency nature of the situation. Crucially, some of the temporary measures introduced in this period have outlasted the crisis itself, becoming a permanent feature of the European political landscape. The current pandemic scenario is reminiscent of what happened during Europe's earlier crisis. With the virus raging across the continent, European governments have re-deployed the emergency argument to justify the tightening of border controls. The pandemic's scope and seriousness have also meant that these policies have become more extensive and invasive than in the past. If the refugee crisis is any indication, the crisis mode that has defined the current policy-making process in the border control domain might become the default option in the future. The threat of future crises might keep some of the new border controls in place after the pandemic is officially over. Some of the exceptional border measures introduced during the pandemic - measures that until recently were deemed incompatible with the European integration project and, in some extreme cases, unimaginable in modern democratic societies - have become normalized. Practices such as national or inter-European travel restrictions, the forced confinement and surveillance of citizens and migrants have become indispensable tools in the policy toolbox that European governments have at their disposal

and can be readily deployed in future crises (health-related or not). A sign that these policies regulating European citizens' mobility might be carried over in the post-pandemic era is the proposal brought forward in the spring of 2021 by the European Union for the introduction of so-called 'vaccine passports', or what the EU calls "Digital Green Certificates' (European Commission 2021). Individual member states have proposed similar plans at the national level.

Even in 'normal' times border control policies are sources of contestation. The increase in mobility restrictions that the pandemic has spurred has rendered this policy realm more controversial, raising the level of opposition they face. The expansion and reconfiguration of border control policies during the pandemic has indeed further raised their public profile, and with it, the level of scrutiny they attract. Even before the pandemic hit, critics had highlighted various ethical, political, and legal issues that governments promoting these policies had to contend with. These issues persist today, and they have been amplified by the crisis and the response by European governments. The main criticism levelled against the expansion of border control measures is that they have a negative impact on the individual rights and life of EU and non-EU citizens. Non-EU citizens, and especially "irregular" migrants from countries that the EU has historically tried to restrict the entry of, are those that will remain the most affected. Health-related concerns, already a recurring theme in the anti-immigration public discourse (e.g., the trope of the migrant as a "spreader of diseases"), will become an even more central concern in the management of irregular migration and migration more generally. As a result, the ever-expanding barriers to non-EU citizens who seek to enter the continent will further impinge on their rights. This is especially the case for those caught up in the net of detention and expulsions practices. The use of new technologies in tracking population movements, both within and outside Europe, also raises thorny legal questions, especially concerning data privacy. One concern stemming from the reliance on extra-territorial policies is that they are used to circumvent domestic legal obligations in liberal democracies. Domestic and international courts have looked closely at these practices and have emphasized their problematic nature. For example, the European Court of Human Rights has evaluated whether acts by the European Union and its member states are consistent with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Legal cases based on pandemic-related policies that violate individual rights are likely to be adjudicated in the near future. The pandemic has also limited the ability of civil society groups, especially transnational NGOs, to support the plight of individuals affected by border policies. Although some organizations have been able to re-establish their

presence on the ground—or on water, as in the case of the Mediterranean Sea—it remains unclear whether NGOs will be able to restore or even increase these activities in the medium term. The strategy that civil society groups might adopt is to follow what some NGOs have already done, namely more forcefully moving their activism online. Through the monitoring of government activities and raising awareness of their impact among the general population, the ultimate objective of putting pressure on government officials is to limit the (ab)use of border control policies. Despite these pressures and the growing challenges that European governments are facing when deploying such policies within and outside Europe, "enhanced" border control is likely to remain a popular approach to manage mobility in Europe, even in a post-pandemic world.

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