

# BORDERS AND THE ARMS TRADE

Last November, our friends at Stop Wapenhandel, the Dutch campaign against the arms trade, released a new report about the role of arms companies in the oppressive borders industry. In this piece [Mark Akkerman](#) explains their findings.

It is 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and Europe has more walls than ever. Many of these have been built primarily to stop migration. There are not only over 1000 kilometres of land walls, but also maritime walls (Frontex operations to intercept refugees at sea) and virtual walls (biometric identification systems to control and monitor migration).

The underlying narrative for the EU policies connected to these walls is the framing of migration as a security problem and a threat. This narrative has been pushed by the military and security industry through effective lobbying, according to the report *The Business of Building Walls*, published by Stop Wapenhandel, the Transnational Institute (TNI) and Centre Dèlas last November.

The erection of all those walls has had devastating consequences for refugees, who encounter violent border guards, forcing them to look for ever more dangerous routes and drives them into the hands of criminal smuggling networks.

EU member states have spent at least €900 million on land

border walls since the end of the Cold War. While the EU in general doesn't fund those walls, its spending on maritime walls has totalled at least €676.4 million between 2006 to 2017 and its spending on virtual walls ran up to €1 billion between 2000 and 2019.

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This boom in border budgets is set to grow. Under its budget for the next EU budget cycle (2021–2027) the European Commission has earmarked €8.02 billion to its Integrated Border Management Fund (2021–2027) and €11.27 billion to border guard agency Frontex. At least €1.9 billion (2000–2027) will go to its identity databases and border surveillance system Eurosur.

Large European arms companies, in particular Leonardo, Airbus and Thales, earn well from their involvement in all these kinds of walls. Helicopters are the most important business for

Airbus and Leonardo here, while Thales provides radar, for example for border patrol ships.

Other companies focus on certain types of walls, like Dutch shipbuilder Damen which provided many Mediterranean countries with border patrol vessels, which are also used extensively during Frontex operations. Spanish company European Security Fencing provided razor wire for the fences around the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, the fence at Calais and the fences on borders of Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary. And French IT company Sopra Steria has secured a string of EU-contracts, worth over €150 million, for the development and maintenance of fingerprint database Eurodac and identity information exchange systems.

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You can read the report and find out more at [stopwapenhandel.org](http://stopwapenhandel.org)