

STRENGTHENING THE STATE BORDER SECURITY

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SUMMARY

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The relevance of the audit

One of the objectives of the National Security Strategy is to strengthen the protection of the EU's external border. The need to strengthen it has significantly increased in June 2021, when Lithuania faced an influx of irregular migrants. In response to the existing situation, steps were taken to erect a physical barrier on the border with the Republic of Belarus. In order to enhance public security, the deployment of modern EU external border surveillance systems, started in 2004, was completed in 2023. The issue of equipping the officers has become particularly important due to the change in the security situation in the country as a result of the war in Ukraine, as the State Border Guard Service is required to perform additional functions during the state of emergency and mobilisation, and integrate into the armed forces during a state of war.

Objective and scope of the audit

The purpose of the audit is to assess whether the entire EU external border in Lithuania is monitored using modern border surveillance technologies, whether the officers of the State Border Guard Service are equipped according to the required standards, and whether the procedures chosen for the installation of the physical barrier have contributed to a quicker installation.

Audited entities:

- ✓ The Ministry of the Interior, as it shapes, organises, coordinates and monitors the implementation of public security policy.
- ✓ The State Border Guard Service under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, because it implements state policy in the areas of state border protection and

control of border crossings, and during wartime it is a part of the armed forces and defends the state.

- ✓ EPSO-G UAB, because it was carrying out a project to install a physical barrier.

The audit period is 2017-2023 for the implementation of surveillance systems and 2022-2023 for the provision of tools to officers. The period covered by the evaluation of the installation of the physical barrier is 2021-2022.

The audit was carried out in accordance with international standards for supreme audit institutions in order to obtain reasonable assurance. The scope of the audit and the methods applied are described in more detail in Annex 2 “Scope and Methods of the Audit and Evaluation” (page 23).

Key audit results

The entire EU external border in Lithuania is monitored using modern border surveillance technologies, but the delayed and unplanned upgrade of 19 out of 25 surveillance systems poses a risk to proper and continuous monitoring of the EU’s external border in the future using surveillance systems.

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To control the influx of irregular migrants, a physical barrier is being installed 3 months faster at the most vulnerable border crossings than at the rest, using a single-supplier procedure with open negotiations.

1. Risk of not ensuring continuous monitoring of the EU external border in Lithuania with surveillance systems in the future

Border surveillance systems in Lithuania are in place along the entire external border of the EU, but we found cases (12.4 km out of the 181 km checked) where, due to natural-geographical conditions, cameras were installed further away from the border line (100-800 m). In the afore-mentioned cases, additional measures are used to monitor the border. Despite the fact that the cameras are located further away from the border line, the continuous surveillance of the EU external border is ensured in the border area where the border legal regime is in force (subsection 1.1, page 10).

Border surveillance systems need to be updated every 5-7 years to ensure their proper functioning. While all 25 surveillance systems should be renewed by 2030, the description of the progress measure “Strengthening the capacity and capability to control the EU’s external border and irregular migration” foresees the renewal of six systems, which are covered by the EU support. The upgrading of the monitoring systems is delayed, with 10 out of the 25 to be upgraded by 2025. Four of them have not yet been funded, although procurement procedures for the renewal of two of them were due to start in autumn 2023 and for two more by April 2024. A failure to upgrade the surveillance systems in time leads to a risk of losing a part of

their functionality and failing to ensure 24/7 surveillance. Other measures and resources may need to be deployed to manage the risk (subsection 1.2, page 13 and subsection 1.3, page 15).

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3. Physical barriers in the most vulnerable border areas are installed 3 months faster than in the rest border areas

The first phase of the physical barrier project was completed 3 months faster than the second phase due to the urgency of the single-supplier procedure. The price paid for the first phase was EUR 3.4 million excluding VAT higher than the price that would have been paid if the average rates for similar works in the second phase had been applied. This may have been due not only to the extreme urgency of the first phase works, which required the organisation of the procurement of materials and the performance of the works in a short timeframe, but also to the more difficult natural conditions, terrain and accessibility of the border sections, and to the pilot works in the first phase, for which the contractor had to select the technology and improve it during the execution of the works (Section 3, page 17).

Recommendations

For the Ministry of the Interior

1. In order to create the preconditions for 24/7 surveillance of the EU external border in Lithuania, we recommend that all actions and the necessary funding be planned for the result indicator under the Public Security Strengthening and Development Programme "Share of the EU external border (part of the Republic of Lithuania) monitored by modern border surveillance technologies, 100%". to be maintained until 2030 (key audit result 1).

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Measures and timeframes for implementing the recommendations, the expected impact of the audit and indicators for measuring change are set out in the section "Plan for the Implementation of Recommendations" of the report (page 21). Up-to-date information on the status of implementation of the recommendations, results and developments is published in open data on the website of the National Audit Office at <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys>.