5. CRIMINAL LAW IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

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INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION WITHIN THE EUROPEAN MODEL OF INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT: CRIMINAL - LAW AND SECURITY ASPECTS IN THE DIGITAL SOCIETY

Abstract: The establishment of the Schengen Area represents one of the major achievements of European civilisation. The abolition of controls at internal borders has enabled the free movement of people, goods and capital for more than 400 million residents living within that area. At the same time, the protection of external borders has posed a particular challenge, since it required the establishment of a common policy among the competent authorities responsible for the management of external borders. In an area without internal border controls, establishing a common response to cross-border threats affecting public policy and the internal security of the Schengen Area has emerged as the most important issue. Conventional armed conflicts, organised crime, terrorism, as well as global challenges manifested in the form of epidemics, poverty and climate change, have contributed to the fact that security challenges today are global and transnational in nature. They simultaneously affect several regions and even continents, exceeding the boundaries of individual states. As a response to

new and complex security threats arising from instability in the immediate neighbourhood of the European Union, the European model of integrated border management has been established as a generally accepted model for managing the external borders of the European Union. Among its components is inter-agency cooperation between national authorities responsible for border control, as a key component in the unification of measures aimed at the effective management of the EU's external borders. This paper is based on information contained in publicly available documents of European Union institutions, as well as on personal experience acquired through the reform of the border management system in the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords: *inter-agency cooperation, integrated border management, European Union, criminal-law concept, security, digital society*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, people have migrated from one place to another, and today they continue to attempt, for various reasons and in different ways, to reach European borders. Some seek legal pathways, while others risk their lives in order to escape political oppression, war and poverty, to reunite with their families, or in pursuit of entrepreneurship, knowledge and education. Each person's migration tells its own story. The scope and intensity of international migration "have increased since the 1970s, with the increasingly pronounced processes of globalisation, that is, the mass movement of goods, capital, people, cultural content and information across the borders of nation-states or large geographical areas" (Bović & Babović, 2013, p. 212). Contemporary legal, sociological and security theory points out that "contemporary international migration is a new and highly complex phenomenon, since it not only transcends nation-states in many ways, creating transnational networks, business, political and other ties, actions and institutions, but also produces effects in several states simultaneously and is controlled by various institutions and national actors" (Castles & Miller, 2003, p. 28).

Traditionally, "migration is the temporary or permanent, voluntary or forced resettlement of a population, either within the borders of one country, from one socio-cultural local or regional environment to another (internal migration), or from one country to another (international migration)" (Mijalković & Petrović, 2016, p. 2). Migration motives have most often been existential in nature, "and among them the dominant motives have

been: the search for a better quality of life, including employment and a higher standard of living; the search for a safer, less violent or non-violent environment, namely leaving pre-conflict or conflict-affected areas, or fleeing repressive regimes and the systemic violation of human freedoms and rights; and, to a certain extent, the search for a healthy living environment" (Mijalković & Petrović, 2016, p. 2).

Migration should be recognised as one of the main areas in which an active and engaged foreign policy of the European Union is of direct importance to its citizens. In addition to the above, globalisation and the new digital era have created opportunities and raised expectations, while the impact of global poverty and conflicts no longer stops at national borders.

The term Integrated Border Management denotes "national and international coordination and cooperation among all relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and trade facilitation, with the aim of establishing effective, efficient and coordinated management of the EU's external borders" (European Commission, 2024; Vasilkov & Ristić, 2025, p. 37). Coordination includes measures between institutions that are hierarchically and horizontally structured and integrated at both the European and national levels (Ristić, 2022).

The main challenges for European border management are related to the secure control of the continuously growing flow of passengers and goods at border crossing points, particularly at air borders, the possible mass influx of irregular migrants, secondary movements, organised crime with a cross-border dimension, and terrorism. The increasing scope and complexity of migratory movements create a challenging environment at the EU's external borders.

As one of the responses to these emerging challenges, the model of European Integrated Border Management was developed as a bridge between migration management and security, as well as an important instrument for protecting the internal security of the Member States, particularly in relation to the prevention and detection of irregular migration and organised crime. The adoption of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation in 2016 was the most important step towards the establishment of the European model of integrated border management. Regulation (EU) No 2016/1624 on the European Border and Coast Guard created, for the first time, a clear legal basis and framework for EU IBM by describing and consolidating its strategic components.

In order to ensure the effective implementation of European Integrated Border Management, the European Border and Coast Guard was established. The European Border and Coast Guard consists of the European

Border and Coast Guard Agency and the national authorities responsible for border management, including coast guards to the extent that they carry out border control tasks. However, despite the adoption of the aforementioned Regulation, the need arose for further improvement of the European Union's normative framework. Accordingly, on 13 November 2019, the European Parliament adopted Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624, Article 3 of which defines all fifteen elements of European Integrated Border Management, including inter-agency cooperation between national authorities responsible for border control.

The primary objective of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation is to establish the concept of integrated border management in order to ensure, as a shared responsibility, the uniform implementation of European Integrated Border Management. This is aimed at the effective management of migration and the provision of a high level of security within the EU, while at the same time preserving the free movement of persons within the EU and fully respecting fundamental rights.

2. SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THE RESPONSE OF CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL SOCIETY

A state "which loses its sovereignty ceases to be a state, and a society, when it loses its identity, ceases to exist as a sovereign entity" (Stajić, 2004, p. 25). The development of the doctrine of security "is connected with the resolution of a number of philosophical-methodological and theoretical issues. One of them is the concept of security, as an integrative concept that encompasses all forms of security - economic, military, geopolitical, political, information, social, demographic, environmental, genetic and others — but which cannot be reduced to their simple sum" (Gaćinović, 2008, p. 6).

The importance of studying security issues "may be manifold: social, scientific and practical" (Stajić, 2010, p. 2). Nevertheless, in theory, some authors consider security to be, "in conceptual terms, so contested that it is not even approximately possible to reach agreement on its meaning" (Dragišić, 2009, p. 163).

Security challenges "are no longer related solely to the defence of the territory of the state; rather, there are increasing demands to devote greater attention to human rights, political stability and democracy, cultural and religious identity, social issues, environmental pollution and population

migration. These issues are gradually becoming important for the study of security and conflict prevention. The concept of comprehensive security has been proposed by security theorists in order to address numerous accumulated security problems. Within this concept, in addition to military aspects, there are also societal, environmental and economic aspects of security" (Kekić, 2014, p. 229). The list of security challenges, risks and threats "has changed throughout history, following globalisation" (Ejdus, 2012, p. 32). States make considerable efforts "to identify security challenges, risks and threats and seek to record them in strategic and normative documents, such as the national security strategy and defence strategy" (Đukić, 2017, p. 228). Security challenges, risks and threats "differ from state to state and from region to region, although there are universal challenges, risks and threats that endanger global security. The security identity of each region consists of specific security problems that distinguish it from other regions, which may have similar or different security problems" (Dragišić, 2013, p. 144). However, in the era of globalisation, national security challenges, risks and threats easily become global.

In the context of the subject matter of this paper, significant security challenges are certainly migration, particularly mass migration, as well as crime, particularly organised crime, whose fundamental characteristic is transnationality. The impact of migration is evident in almost all spheres of life and work of modern human beings. A phenomenon that has become particularly prominent is that of irregular migration. Irregular migration "represents the movement of people taking place outside the institutional and legal norms of international and national law, involving the country of origin, the country of transit and the country of final destination of migrants" (Stojšić Dabetić & Mirković, 2018, p. 33). Defined in this way, irregular migration represents a particular challenge in terms of border control and border management. It also raises relevant questions concerning certain security aspects of migrant movements, as well as the issue of the security of the population of a particular geographical area of a state in which migrants settle.

Migration, and especially irregular migration, affects not only the economic and financial stability of states, but also the destabilisation of existing national labour markets due to the mass inflow, as well as outflow, of new labour. The demographic destabilisation of states is certainly an aspect that deserves special attention. Another aspect, often neglected but highly significant in this context, is the large-scale disturbance of public order and peace in states that are transit or final destinations for migrants, particularly in cases of mass migration. Finally, mass migration "also leads

to an increase in the scope and diversity of all types of crime, primarily migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and other criminal offences related to migration, such as forgery of documents, illegal crossing of the state border, facilitation of illegal crossing of the state border, kidnapping, coercion and similar offences" (Mijalković & Petrović, 2016, p. 7).

Crime as a social phenomenon has been known since the very emergence of humankind. It has changed in its forms and intensity, while "its manifestations have become more socially dangerous and adaptable to contemporary trends in the development of computing and technology on an international scale" (Matijašević & Pavlović, 2009, p. 57). Organised crime stands out in particular due to its complexity and severity. Almost all countries in the world are faced with the problem of countering organised crime. What is particularly significant is that it does not manifest itself in all countries in the same forms and with the same intensity; rather, its forms correspond to existing social relations and are numerous and diverse.

The activities of transnational organised crime "take place in the territory of two or more states or are, on any grounds, connected with several states. Organised crime is becoming increasingly internationalised, expanding its influence in the economic and political spheres across the territories of several countries" (Matijašević, 2008, p. 81). The internationalisation of organised crime is becoming increasingly pronounced. A little more than twenty years ago, the number and structure of criminal activities carried out on an international scale were not so diverse. It is therefore more than evident that transnational organised crime will continue to develop and expand, both into new areas of socio-economic and political life and spatially, into other states.

From a criminological standpoint, "it is clear that irregular migrants must move outside the institutional and legal framework of international law, and that the role and significance of organised criminal groups is to exploit this fact and this need to the fullest extent. For this reason, irregular migrants are forced to come into contact with members of various criminal groups, who will 'assist' them on their way to their final destination" (Ghrib, 2002, p. 31). The activities of organised criminal groups are "targeted towards providing logistical support and organising individuals and groups for the purpose of illegally crossing state borders along migration routes" (Pavlović & Odalović, 2016, p. 67).

The concept of external border management "began to be used in European legislation after the adoption of the conclusions of the European Council in Laeken in 2001, and the reason for its introduction lay in the need for the more efficient functioning of the Schengen Area under

conditions of its continuous enlargement" (Božović & Vasilkov, 2020, p. 108). After a decade of the existence and development of the concept of integrated border management "as a segment of the Union's secondary legislation and the Schengen acquis, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, integrated external border management was introduced into the founding treaties for the first time and became an integral part of EU primary law. The legal basis for the development of integrated border management is contained in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), within the policy on external border control, asylum and immigration in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice" (Božović & Vasilkov, 2020, p. 110).

The new legal framework "enabled the amendment of existing secondary legislation and the strengthening of supranational elements in the adoption of Schengen legislation. Accordingly, the Schengen Catalogue of Best Practices was amended, a new Schengen evaluation mechanism was adopted authorising the Commission to carry out checks on the implementation of the Schengen acquis in the Member States (Council Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013), and the European Border Surveillance System — Eurosur — was established" (Božović & Vasilkov, 2020, p. 110).

It is important to emphasise that, in responding to security challenges, modern society also includes an important segment: the digital concept in approach and organisation. Namely, digitalisation in the process of border management plays a key role in modernisation, increasing efficiency and security, and ensuring alignment with the standards of the European Union. It enables a balance between open borders for legal trade and travellers, on the one hand, and strict controls aimed at combating smuggling and irregular migration, on the other.

The key aspects of the importance of digitalisation in border management include: more efficient controls and faster flows, since digital systems reduce the time required for document processing and border crossing, as manual document indexing is not required; combating smuggling, as digitalisation enables more efficient border control and represents a key tool in the fight against various forms of international smuggling; electronic document formats, since the transition to electronic formats enables faster and more secure data exchange, as part of the broader digital revolution at border crossing points; alignment with EU standards, since the new Integrated Border Management Strategy (IBMR) entails the application of technical and operational concepts in accordance with EU legal regulations; and integrated management, as digitalisation enables

better coordination among the various institutions involved in border control.

3. EUROPEAN INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT AND INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

European Integrated Border Management consists of the following 12 strategic components, defined in Article 3 of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, which form the basis of the European IBM strategic framework:

(a) border control, including measures to facilitate legitimate border crossings and, where appropriate, measures related to the prevention and detection of cross-border crime at the external borders, in particular migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and terrorism, as well as mechanisms and procedures for the identification of vulnerable persons and unaccompanied minors, and for the identification of persons who are in need of international protection or wish to apply for such protection, the provision of information to such persons and their referral;

(b) search and rescue operations for persons in distress at sea, launched and carried out in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 656/2014 and international law, which take place in situations that may arise during border surveillance operations at sea;

(c) risk analysis for internal security and analysis of threats that may affect the functioning or security of the external borders;

(d) information exchange and cooperation among the Member States in the areas covered by this Regulation, as well as information exchange and cooperation between the Member States and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, including support coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency;

(e) inter-agency cooperation among the national authorities in each Member State responsible for border control or other tasks carried out at the border, as well as among the authorities responsible for return in each Member State, including regular information exchange through existing information exchange tools, including, where appropriate, cooperation with national bodies responsible for the protection of fundamental rights;

(f) cooperation among the relevant Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies in the areas covered by this Regulation, including regular information exchange;

(g) cooperation with third countries in the areas covered by this Regulation, focusing in particular on neighbouring third countries and those third countries identified through risk analysis as countries of origin or transit for illegal immigration;

(h) technical and operational measures within the Schengen Area related to border control and designed to better address illegal immigration and combat cross-border crime;

(i) the return of third-country nationals who are subject to return decisions issued by a Member State;

(j) the use of state-of-the-art technology, including large-scale information systems;

(k) a quality control mechanism, in particular the Schengen evaluation mechanism, vulnerability assessment and possible national mechanisms, in order to ensure the implementation of Union law in the field of border management;

(l) solidarity mechanisms, in particular Union funding instruments.

Fundamental rights, education and training, as well as research and innovation, are overarching elements in the implementation of European Integrated Border Management (Regulation 2019/1896). According to Article 3 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard, European Integrated Border Management consists of 12 strategic components, of which the fifth component, point "e", refers to inter-agency cooperation among the national authorities in each Member State responsible for border control or other tasks carried out at the border, as well as among the authorities responsible for return in each Member State, including regular information exchange through existing information exchange tools, including, where appropriate, cooperation with national bodies responsible for the protection of fundamental rights. Inter-agency cooperation takes place at the European, national and local levels, with the aim of ensuring the coordination of all activities in order to close gaps in action, avoid duplication of competences and enable the use of all available resources of the competent institutions participating in border control. The responsibilities and competences of the various actors performing border control tasks may occasionally overlap, which, in certain areas of activity, leaves room for important issues to remain insufficiently defined. In this regard, regular dialogue at the strategic level and coordination of activities at the local level are essential, with the aim of harmonising operational procedures and avoiding overlaps in action. Furthermore, information exchange and the interoperability of information systems are of key

importance in order to achieve the best possible situational picture and enable an effective fight against all forms of cross-border crime. In addition, operational cooperation must be established in order to optimise the efficient use of resources and increase response capabilities in situations of increased threat to the state border.

The normative framework that more closely defines inter-agency cooperation at the level of the European Union is grounded in the Schengen Borders Code. Recital 18 states that "Member States should designate the national service or services responsible for carrying out border-control tasks in accordance with their national law. Where more than one service is responsible in the same Member State, there should be close and constant cooperation between them" (Regulation 2016/399). Furthermore, Article 16, paragraph 3, of the same Code states that "For the effective implementation of border control, each Member State shall ensure close and constant cooperation between its national services responsible for border control" (Regulation 2016/399). In addition, the "Schengen Catalogue for External Border Control, Return and Readmission — Recommendations and Best Practices" (Doc. 7864/09), in Section 10 concerning border guards, customs, police, national security and other relevant authorities, provides in Recommendation 149 that "there should be regular coordination of inter-agency cooperation at all levels. Regular meetings should be held between the heads of services, where annual priorities are decided and objectives and guidelines are set. These decisions are further elaborated at planned meetings between heads at the regional level. Current arrangements for joint operations, activities and other measures are planned through cooperation and at meetings with managers at the local level."

In order to introduce a practical approach to strengthening cooperation between customs and border police representatives, to provide support to the Member States in this area, and to describe the scope and approach to inter-agency cooperation between border police and customs, the European Commission, in cooperation with the Member States, prepared the "Guidelines for Cooperation between Customs and Border Police" (Ares (2018)6193959 – 3 December 2018). The document states that Member States should establish a clear formal basis for inter-agency cooperation between border police and customs in the form of a written strategic cooperation document at the national level, supplemented, where necessary, at the regional and/or local level. Such a document should contain the principles and areas of cooperation, defined competences, established communication channels, contingency plans and responses aimed at increasing the capacity to carry out border control. The Guidelines cover the

following eight areas of cooperation: synchronised checks, mainly at land borders; joint infrastructure and procurement planning; information exchange; risk analysis; equipment; training; investigations; and joint multi-purpose operations. Furthermore, the "Schengen Catalogue, External Border Control, Return and Readmission — Recommendations and Best Practices" (Doc. 7864/09) also emphasises the segment of inter-agency cooperation among bodies involved in performing tasks at the border, stating that there should be regular coordination of inter-agency cooperation at all levels, through regular meetings at which objectives are set, guidelines for joint action are determined, and joint operations and other necessary measures are planned.

The division of tasks among the bodies should be clear in order to avoid duplication of tasks. The recommendations and best practices emphasise the establishment of a permanent body for coordinating inter-agency cooperation, as well as examples such as: joint radio communications, for example TETRA; joint risk analysis centres and joint risk analyses; joint criminal intelligence services and joint pre-investigation teams; joint use of databases; joint patrols at green and blue borders; and the one-stop control principle at land border crossing points, where border police and customs work together.

The Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management (Doc. 10.2819/76516) also provides guidance on inter-agency cooperation, given that effective inter-agency cooperation lies at the core of European Integrated Border Management. It requires a coordinated division of tasks, the establishment of national and European cooperation structures, the planning of the joint use of capacities and communication channels, and the harmonisation of working procedures.

Taking into account the above normative framework, cooperation should be planned on the basis of a common understanding of the situation, including joint risk and threat analysis. The exchange of information and intelligence between the competent authorities is of particular importance, as is the existence of a mechanism for resolving potential disputes. Furthermore, cooperation should include operational matters, such as the use of compatible communication equipment, the planning of joint operations, and participation in joint training and exercises.

4. CRIMINAL-LAW ASPECTS OF INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION IN BORDER MANAGEMENT

The criminal-law aspect of inter-agency cooperation is particularly evident in the prevention, detection and proving of criminal offences with a cross-border dimension. State border management is not merely an administrative and security-related activity, but also an important mechanism for the early identification of forms of crime that most often manifest themselves through migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings, forgery of travel and other documents, illicit trafficking in narcotics, weapons and other goods, as well as activities related to terrorism and organised crime. For this reason, inter-agency cooperation has a significant preventive, operational and evidentiary function.

From a criminal-law perspective, the timely exchange of information between the border police, customs service, inspection authorities and other competent services is of particular importance, since only through coordinated action can indicators pointing to the existence of a criminal offence be identified. Such indicators may relate to unusual travel patterns, routes of movement, the manner of transporting persons or goods, suspicious documentation, the involvement of several persons in organised criminal activity, as well as data indicating logistical support to criminal groups. In this sense, inter-agency cooperation contributes not only to more efficient border control, but also to the timely detection of the elements of a criminal offence.

The criminal-procedural dimension of cooperation is also of particular importance. Information collected during border control, customs control or inspection supervision may be relevant for the further course of criminal proceedings, provided that it has been collected lawfully, properly recorded and forwarded to the competent authorities in a timely manner. It is therefore necessary to clearly define the procedures for action, the manner of notifying the competent services, the rules on the storage and forwarding of data, as well as mechanisms of cooperation with the public prosecutor’s office and other criminal prosecution authorities. This ensures that operational findings, physical evidence and documentation may have appropriate significance in proving criminal offences. Digitalisation further strengthens the criminal-law significance of inter-agency cooperation. The use of modern information systems, databases, risk analysis and electronic data exchange enables faster identification of suspicious persons, vehicles, documents and patterns of behaviour. However, the use of digital tools must be based on the principles of legality, proportionality, personal data

protection and respect for fundamental rights. Only such an approach enables digital information exchange to be both effective from a security perspective and acceptable from the standpoint of criminal law and the protection of human rights.

In the context of the Republic of Serbia, the criminal-law aspect of inter-agency cooperation is of particular importance in the process of alignment with European Union standards, especially in the areas of combating organised crime, irregular migration, trafficking in human beings and other forms of cross-border crime. Effective integrated border management implies that the competent services do not act in isolation, but rather as part of a functionally connected system that enables the rapid identification of risks, the lawful collection of data, coordinated action and the forwarding of relevant information to the authorities responsible for criminal prosecution. In this way, inter-agency cooperation becomes one of the important instruments of criminal-law protection of the state border, internal security and the legal order.

5. COMPONENTS OF INTER - AGENCY COOPERATION AND JOINT BORDER MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Effective information exchange is a key element in the fight against terrorism, organised crime with a cross-border dimension, irregular migration and people smuggling. This requires the provision of appropriate tools for the collection, access and exchange of necessary information between the authorities responsible for border management. The objective of information exchange is to establish an efficient and rapid flow of information between different users. The information exchange system should be defined in a formal cooperation document and described in operational instructions or a manual, which should also contain standardised forms and templates for reporting statistical data or information, with clearly defined rules specifying who may share which information. The harmonisation of data collection systems also facilitates data exchange and cooperation with other services. Regardless of the method used, whether a customised or basic IT system, paper-based exchange or telephone communication, data protection must always be ensured. Information exchange procedures should therefore cover the following areas: the preparation of daily, weekly and monthly reports, from the local and regional levels to the central level and vice versa, with a clearly defined format, deadlines and responsible persons; the preparation of analytical reports, from the central level to the regional and local levels; the collection

of statistical data at the local and central levels, including the definition of responsible persons, the data to be collected, the manner in which they are collected, the collection form, and the manner, time and recipients of their submission; and the preparation of early warnings, including the definition of responsible persons and the types of events to be reported.

An important component of inter-agency cooperation is also the early warning system. The objective of the early warning system is to enable rapid responses to emergency situations relevant to preserving the security of the state border. Early warning procedures are designed to warn of an emerging problem that may affect the security of the state border and that requires an urgent response by the competent border management authorities, partner agencies and/or neighbouring countries. Early warning information contains the first indicators of an emergency situation faced by the country or by one of the competent border management agencies.

This includes changes in the modus operandi, changes in the routes of movement or modes of transport of irregular migrants, new types of large-scale forgery of travel documents, a significant increase in irregular immigration, or the infiltration of large groups by smuggling networks. The implementation of an early warning system requires a complex and comprehensive approach with decentralised management. The agencies responsible for border management should establish horizontal and vertical communication structures in order to quickly inform one another of possible security threats. The local, regional and central levels of the agencies responsible for border management should ensure that relevant information is distributed in a timely manner, while the responsibilities and obligations of the responsible agencies or persons should be described in standard operating procedures. These procedures should also set out in detail the duties of the person or unit responsible for the distribution of early warnings. At the national level, there should be a harmonised approach based on existing risk assessments or risk profiles, while officials at each level should be aware of which information is relevant to their counterparts in other border management agencies, both at the inter-agency and international levels. It should also be emphasised that the agencies responsible for border management should consider the implementation of joint or coordinated measures in order to carry out border control effectively. One-stop control is an example of joint border control at border crossing points. In this regard, the term “one-stop control” refers to the concept of joint physical checks carried out by border police and customs officers only once, at the same time and in the same place. Joint checks of persons and goods may also be carried out by mobile units on the basis of

risk analysis. In most cases, such mobile units consist of members of the border police and customs service, although the participation of other competent law enforcement agencies is also possible, such as phytosanitary and veterinary inspection services, as well as other relevant authorities. Certainly, a significant segment of strengthening inter-agency cooperation is achieved through the joint use of facilities and infrastructure, equipment, and joint training activities.

6. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

When discussing the services in the Republic of Serbia that are included in the integrated border management system, it should be emphasised that each service has a specific scope of work and competences arising from the applicable regulations governing that service. However, the Law on State Administration (2005), in Chapter 2, Mutual Relations of State Administration Bodies, Articles 64, 65, 66 and 67, establishes the basis for cooperation and action by the state authorities of the Republic of Serbia included in the integrated border management system. Furthermore, Article 3 of the Law on Border Control of the Republic of Serbia (2018), inter alia, defines the concept of integrated border management: "Integrated border management is a set of measures and activities undertaken by state administration authorities responsible for border management, in accordance with applicable laws, strategies and other acts."

For the purposes of integrated border management, on the basis of the integrated border management strategies adopted to date by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the latest Strategy having been adopted at the 149th session of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 4 August 2022, it is determined that integrated border management in the Republic of Serbia entails a comprehensive system of cooperation and the involvement of a large number of competent state authorities. The lead institutions for the activities are the Ministry of Interior - Border Police Directorate, the Ministry of Finance - Customs Administration, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management - Veterinary Directorate and Plant Protection Directorate. The Action Plan for the Implementation of the Integrated Border Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2022–2027, adopted for the period 2025–2027, further elaborates specific objectives into individual activities, with a defined deadline for implementation, the responsible authority and the source of funding.

For the purpose of strengthening overall cooperation and improving security processes, as well as all other processes within integrated border management, in accordance with the powers and obligations established by law and regulations adopted on the basis of law, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Integrated Border Management was signed in 2019. The Agreement was signed with a view to improving security, preventing all forms of criminal activity, ensuring a faster flow of passengers, goods and capital, enabling the efficient collection of customs duties and other import duties, value added tax, excise duties and fees, preventing the introduction of quarantine diseases of animals and plants, preventing corruption and ensuring the integrity of civil servants, all with the aim of achieving economic stability and the economic development of the country, as well as increasing the efficiency of the performance of integrated border management tasks. The Agreement defines the areas of cooperation, namely: harmonisation of work, coordination of activities and improvement of cooperation, information exchange, mutual and professional technical assistance, joint activities, action in emergency situations, international cooperation and other relevant issues. Furthermore, on the basis of the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Integrated Border Management, the Protocol on Data and Information Exchange between the Services Included in the Integrated Border Management System was signed in 2019. The subject matter of the Protocol is the determination of the manner of data and information exchange between the services included in the integrated border management system, which contributes both to increasing the level of national security and to the more efficient work of the services. The exchange takes place between the signatories to the Protocol with the aim of improving and strengthening inter-agency cooperation, as well as coordinating joint action and work necessary for the effective functioning of integrated border management.

Cooperation within the framework of the Integrated Border Management Strategy in the Republic of Serbia is reflected in participation in working groups and meetings aimed at exchanging data, experience and good practice. The Protocol determines the methods of data exchange, the designation of a contact person for all aspects of exchange, the ensuring of the reliability of submitted data and the timeliness of submission, and other related matters. The Protocol also establishes the obligation to hold joint meetings at the central and regional levels on a quarterly basis, and at the local level at least once a month.

CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind the need to fulfil all necessary conditions for the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the European Union and for the full implementation of all components of integrated border management, it is important to emphasise that the new European concept of integrated border management, in addition to the overall set of external border control measures, attaches great importance to inter-agency cooperation. Consequently, within integrated border management, the joint activities of the services involved are of considerable importance and play a significant role.

The guidelines for the joint activities of all services involved in integrated border management in the Republic of Serbia should contribute to strengthening their cooperation, particularly between the police and customs services as strategic partners, and should enable even better integration of controls over persons and goods in order to ensure smooth and secure border crossings.

Joint activities should aim at and contribute to the establishment of an integrated border management system which, in the simplest possible manner and on the premise of flexibility and operability at all levels, will be able to provide an appropriate response and possess the capacity and authority to act on all issues relating to integrated border management, which is precisely the purpose and role of these guidelines.

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