Introduction

Political borders can be regarded as a foundational structural feature of today’s global political order, the “national order of things” (Liisa Malkki), both in terms of the internal and external dimension of governance, but also socially, economically and culturally. Political borders are not new, nor are various forms of border control. However, it was only following the ascendency of the nation state model in the 18th and 19th century and its universalisation in the first half of the 20th century that political borders came to be those seemingly unambiguous lines delimiting exclusive national territories from each other, which arguably is one of the main factors imbuing political borders with such political and symbolical significance and turning them into a primary locus of control. Various political transformations in the late 20th century, including the ascendency of neoliberal economic thought, with its emphasis on deregulation and reduction of barriers to trade, including barriers to the movement of people, the end of the block-confrontation and the related opening of hitherto closed or almost closed borders, European integration and the related abolishment of border controls within the Schengen participating countries have led to additional shifts in the meaning and practice of borders and border control, reflected, amongst others, in the relabeling of border control/ border policing into border management, the increasing involvement of private actors, supranational actors and third countries (“shifting up, down and out” in the words of Guiraudon and Lahav). These transformations have also led to an increasing acceptance of freedom of movement (however conditional) as an intrinsic good and a feature of modern liberal democratic governance which also implies (however conditional) rights to movement across borders.

“Border management” in this context should essentially mediate between the contradictory objectives of ensuring a smooth flow of cross-border traffic of bona fide travellers, while maintaining control over the movement of “undesirable aliens”. As has been noted by various authors, the border in this context acts as a filter, rather than a barrier. This function of borders also has profound impacts on what happens once migrants and other border crossers have crossed a border, both in terms of individuals’ rights and statuses and in terms of mechanisms of migration control. These aspects – important as they are – will not be in the foreground of this activity.

Research focus

Instead, this IMISCOE workshop will focus on the border itself as a locus of control, the control of border crossings (whether at the border or elsewhere) and recent transformations of border control. In doing so, the workshop will probe into the various contradictions of contemporary border management, including the contradiction between the stated objective to facilitate “legitimate travel” versus the objective to maintain absolute control about in- and, to a lesser extent, outflows; the contradictions emerging from the increasing shift towards risk analysis based and random selective control philosophies promoted by certain supranational actors and the persistence of traditional control logics involving comprehensive controls.

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favoured by parts of the public as well as stakeholders; and the contradictions emerging from the increasing use of human rights language by control actors and the exclusion of important aspects of control from the applicability of (enforceable) human rights. A second line of enquiry will focus on new and emerging modes of border control, often linked to technologies of surveillance and large-scale ICT based systems and technological fantasies suggesting that technological solutions will help to overcome inherent contradictions of border control and surveillance. A third line of enquiry will focus on the wide range of pre-border controls established to filter out “undesirable aliens” from “bona fide” travellers before actually reaching the physical border.

Contemporary politics of mobility in Europe

The contemporary historical context is characterised by a perception of a (renewed) immigration crisis linked to the Arab spring, the (short lived) large-scale inflows of irregular migrants from Tunisia, continuing high levels of inflows of irregular migrants via Greece, and a increasing opposition to the Schengen system and freedom of movement within the Europe, in turn linked partly to the crisis of immigration to the EU, if not limited to it. In this context, prevention of irregular migration has been re-articulated as one of the main drivers of policies towards border control. Enforcement measures that emerged in the past one or two decades such as externalised controls and digitalised controls are designed to address and reduce irregular migration, meaning that irregularity becomes a critical point at which the politics of migration and control meet.

In fact, the European Union’s “Global approach to migration” has as its second pillar the goal of “preventing and reducing irregular migration in an efficient, yet humane way”. The European Commission’s 2010-2014 Stockholm programme and accordant Action Plan address the issue of irregular migration by emphasising the reinforcement of border controls, in particular through the use of EUROSUR and FRONTEX as well as the implementation of the VIS and SIS II systems as a key objective. Recently, additional border surveillance initiatives in the EU have also been put forward as a means to reduce irregular migration: an Entry-Exit System (EES) to record the movement of people coming in and out of the Schengen area through biometric data, with the goal of identifying overstayers, and the Registered Traveller Programme (RTP) to allow those pre-vetted travellers who are not considered a security risk to cross borders via automated border gates. The development of new border management systems do not represent a “hardening” or “softening” of border controls per se, but rather a prioritisation of certain types of cross-border activity; while border crossing becomes facilitated for certain economic classes and trade interests, it is encumbered for economic migrants, refugees and other groups. These new systems have already raised significant human rights concerns, as they may have a negative impact in terms of the right to protection, considering that the vague definitions of responsibility and burden sharing (for example for those irregular migrants identified at sea) could be used as a

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means of preventing people from reaching EU territory, among other human rights considerations, such as the right to privacy and data protection.\textsuperscript{11}

Moreover, the EC’s Action Plan also notes the increased use of new technologies as an efficient means to address cross-border crime as well as the need for data collection and information sharing across borders. The former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, in his address to Parliament, remarked: “Massive flow of drugs and migrants are coming to Europe and affect its security. These threats are significant by themselves, but it is their combination that constitutes a radical challenge to our security.”\textsuperscript{12} Such actions and remarks conflate the issue of irregularity with crime, where both are addressed by the same cutting-edge technologies in the context of national security and the “fight” against irregular migration.\textsuperscript{13}

Considering the vast expansion of the use of new technologies for border control, it is important to examine the implications thereof. The workshop will examine different implications of these recent transformations of border control, including the ascendancy of human rights in border control and technological developments with regard to border control in Europe and analyse them in the context of a perceived “crisis” of irregular immigration in comparison with the realities on the ground. On the one hand, the use of these technologies in the larger European context represents a “securitisation” of mobility, being used in the context of national security and governance of irregular migration. On the other hand, these technologies also promise greater freedoms for certain travellers, paradoxically equating freedom with “fastness” and “smoothness” of travel. While most research on border control and border regimes has been conducted from the vantage point of irregular migration – in many ways an “exceptional” rather than a typical phenomenon\textsuperscript{14}, mirroring the logic of policy debates on border control, the alleged greater freedoms that come with new modes and technologies of border controls for “legitimate” travellers also require an understanding of day-to-day practices of border control in relation to “ordinary” travellers. This workshop will address the issue from both perspectives.


\textsuperscript{12} Solana, Javier (2003): “Summary of the Address by Mr. Javier Solana, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy to the European Parliament”.

\textsuperscript{13} Walters, William (2011): “Rezoning the global: technological zones, technological work and the (un-)making of biometric borders” in: The Contested Politics of Mobility.

\textsuperscript{14} Cf. the overall volume of cross-mobility to the number of refused or apprehended aliens.