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4.15.2 Coordinated EU approach and increasing role of Frontex

With an expanded mandate through a new regulation issued in December 2019, Frontex is now responsible for organising voluntary departures of third-country nationals who were issued a return decision by a Member State. Frontex can provide technical support to national authorities for voluntary returns on both scheduled and charter flights, including the chartering of an aircraft. Therefore, this marked an important change in 2020 in the way voluntary returns are operationalised at the EU level. In addition, the European Commission adopted the first EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration in April 2021.[1205]

As a result, several EU+ countries explored new pathways of cooperation with Frontex in the field of return. In fact, Estonia amended its legislation[1206] in order to regulate international cooperation with Frontex. The new cooperation with EU+ countries resulted in a growing number of voluntary returns which were organised or facilitated by Frontex, resulting in nearly one in every five rejected applicants being returned by the end of 2020. The largest operation entailed the return of 107 Georgian nationals from Larnaca to Tbilisi.[1207]

[1205] European Commission. (2021, April 27). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration: {SWD(2021) 121 final}*. COM(2021) 120 final. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/default/files/pdf/27042021-eu-strategy-voluntary-return-reintegration-com-2021-120_en.pdf

[1206] Väljasõidukohustuse ja sissesõidukeelu seaduse ning välismaalasele rahvusvahelise kaitse andmise seaduse muutmise seadus (massilise sisserände tõkestamine) [Act Amending the Obligation to Leave and Prohibition on Entry Act and the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens (Prevention of Mass Immigration)]. https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/117062020001

[1207] European Border and Coast Guard Agency. (2021). *2020 in brief*. https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/General/In_Brief_2020/20.0147_inbrief_2020_11th_web_fixed4.pdf

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