

# EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD STANDING CORPS CATEGORY 1 BASIC TRAINING TOPICALITIES IN ENSURING THE EU BORDER SECURITY

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**Abstract.** *Establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps Category 1 has been recently the most visible change in the European approach in the management of the EU external borders. The political decision of the EU to have its own law enforcement officers for border protection and migration management and return-related tasks, has manifested a paradigm shift, also in training and education. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has a leading role in capacity building, for example in terms of providing training for the members of the Category 1. The Agency Regulation provides a legal basis for the statutory staff of the Standing Corps, in particular highlighting the importance of training based on common values and culture, and respect of fundamental rights. The European dimension of the Standing Corps training is underpinned by the legal and ethical responsibilities of the Agency to ensure that the members of the Standing Corps are well trained and fully prepared to perform tasks with executive powers. The main aim of the paper is to explore the establishment of standing corps from the perspective of basic training. The context presented supports the thesis that the initial training serves as the foundation of public agreement and investment for common safety and security. The paper builds upon hands-on experience of the author and draws the general conclusion to prove the thesis based on the legal instruments presented and implementation of basic training editions.*

**Keywords:** *basic training, common core curriculum, Frontex, standing corps.*

## Introduction

*“Safety and security don't just happen: they are the result of collective consensus and public investment” (Mandela N, 2002).*

Training in the context of border and coast guard (BCG) has its specific, exceptional meaning and role. Due to operational context, it significantly overcomes primary purpose of vocational training that aims to support members of organisation to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by a particular job and organization to improve quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. The BCG's responsibility connected with duty of ensuring safety and security of borders and people crossing them, implicates the unique character of the training that should be provided. The law

<https://doi.org/10.17770/bsm.v4i9.7049>

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enforcement training should be seen from the perspective of dynamic operational circumstances, of a need for immediate and constant change to respond to the requirements but foremost from the perspective of shaping values, common culture, the right attitude - ethical behaviour that is based on the fundamental rights. That is the investment that pays off building interoperability and cooperation to guarantee security and safety.

**The main aim** of the paper is to explore the establishment of standing corps from the perspective of basic training.

The paper builds upon hands-on experience of the author and draws the general conclusion to prove the thesis based on the legal instruments presented and implementation of basic training editions.

## **Body**

Establishment of the European area of freedom and justice expanded the meaning of security to the common, shared responsibility founded by respect to fundamental rights, European culture, and values. The concept of security is seen more as the integrated system of managing external borders of the EU, where the role of individual entity and national authorities play equal and vital role.

Since Schengen Agreement in 1985 (Schengen Agreement, 14 June 1985), the cooperation built on mutual trust between the countries is maintained by the effective implementation of law on border control and border management standards. The cross-border cooperation is one of the most important European developments that comprises international law and regulations relevant for creation of international and national security, enabling Member States benefitting from strategic policy and partnership.

Following the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 77(1)(c) Treaty on European Union (TEU), 2009), 'the gradual introduction of an integrated management system for external borders' is a necessary component of the European Union policy development. The components, principles, and main stakeholders for European integrated border management were established for the very first time in 2016 in the EBCG Regulation (Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624), and further developed in 2019 (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624), by setting out the European integrated border management (EIBM) policy cycle with a strategic objective on the way of addressing the

challenges in the field of border management and return in a coherent, integrated, and systematic manner by the European Border and Coast Guard.

The European integrated border management is established by 15 thematic components, 3 of which are listed as overarching, thus providing the necessary umbrella for all the activities related (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard, art.4). Education and training are one these three, next to fundamental rights and research and innovation. This fact underlines an important role of training and education that shall be based on harmonized and quality assured training standards, considering operational needs, tasks, and legal competence and with an emphasis on a clear understanding of the values enshrined in the Treaties. Furthermore, it should promote the highest standards and best practices in the implementation of Union border and return law, with a special emphasis on the protection of vulnerable persons, including children, and on the respect of fundamental rights, and promote a common culture.

The political decision of the EU to have its own law enforcement officers for border protection, migration management and return-related tasks, has manifested a paradigm shift, also in training and education. The concept of education and training of the standing corps (SC) category one (cat.1) was elaborated with the view to guarantee EBCG cooperation and interoperability. Such an aim can be achieved, if the core competences and training provided for the new formation is in harmony with the ones provided by the Member States to the national border and coast guards. Utilizing the Agency Common Core Curricula (Common Core Curriculum for Border and Coast Guard Basic Training in the EU (2017), Common Core Curriculum for Border and Coast Guard Mid-Level Management Training in the EU (2019)) as a basis for the training development made that possible. The main approach of the training delivered is that the staff coming from the Member States, as well as the EBCG SC cat. 1 are trained based on the same standards and follow harmonised tactical and operational approaches, therefore have a similar understanding of respect for fundamental rights and promote interoperability.

Numerous generations of European border and coast guards has grown on the common core curricula in terms of education and training. The efforts to develop common European standards for border and coast guard training were already made prior to the formal operationalization of Frontex by launching the Common Core Curriculum for the Border and Coast Guard Basic Training in the EU (known as CCC Basic). Under Agency's patronage the

Common Core Curriculum has been later updated and further developed. Nowadays, the Common Core Curricula for Border and Coast Guard Basic Training, and Mid-level Management Training in the EU (CCC Basic and CCC ML) are integrated into national training systems for border and coast guards in the EU Member States and several non-EU countries, promoting high ethical values, respect for fundamental rights and the operational cooperation among EU and national authorities working on the borders. Interoperability is a necessary component for efficient cooperation thus, it is also important part of European border and coast guard education and training, and some of the core professional competences are built upon it. With the design of the Basic Training for the European Border and Coast Guard SC cat.1 the best practices of the CCC were exercised to develop professional competences of the cat.1 officers enabling them “to operate in a unitary manner in any particular operational area assigned, generating added value to the Member States, fully respecting fundamental rights in all actions, and ensuring the EU border security.” (Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, art. 55.7, 82).

The first Basic Training Programme (BTP) for the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps cat. 1 (EBCG SC cat.1) was designed between October 2019 and February 2020 in close cooperation with the experts and trainers from MSs. One of the main objectives of the basic training is to develop a common border and coast guard culture and values as well as harmonised practices for the members of the SC cat. 1 who come from different law enforcement services of the EU, with a rich variety of professional backgrounds. In this regard the basic training is like a “melting pot” - during the training period all students, coming with very diverse professional and personal backgrounds, also from different national ranks and positions, should find a common way of considering the organizational cultural matters and shared values, to be able to operate in a unitary manner in demanding circumstances. Having the duration of six months, the BTP is addressed to recruits with a law enforcement background. It has a modular structure. The advantage of the basic training in comparison to the most common national basic training is that it prepares the learners to all three borders: land, air, and sea, regardless the future deployment.

In 2021 the Basic Training Programme (EBTP), (Executive Direction Decision No R-ED-2022-6 of 13 January 2022 on adoption of the Extended Basic Training Programme for the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps, Category 1 and Assessment Strategy of the Extended Basic Training Programme for the European Border and Coast Guard standing

corps, Category 1.) design was extended to approximately twelve months to address an audience without previous law enforcement background. The extended version of the Programme includes nine weeks of experiential learning (three weeks in the first semester and six weeks in the second semester) – practical part directly on the border. After graduation of EBTP the EBCG SC cat. 1 officer is ready to be deployed on the borders with the border guard officer profile. Furthermore, officers can attend the profile/specialised training following the same path as after graduation of BTP.

The amendments introduced for the extension of the training programme served as the basis for the update of its six months version in 2022. Thus, in 2022 there are two versions of the basic training running in parallel – one year and six months duration depending on the professional background of the learners. The BTP 2022 equally to the extended version, offers the border guard officer (BGO) profile for all successful graduates. In the future Frontex is planning to have one BTP responding to the needs of all candidates.

Learning about fundamental rights is an essential part of the BTP. Fundamental rights of all persons must be respected and protected in all border control activities, as prescribed by EU and international law. The standing corps are expected to have the skills and the ability to respect fundamental rights in their daily work with different people, no matter their race, gender, age, religion or other. When properly trained, border guards can play a key role in ensuring that people are not discriminated, and they get adequate support and information.

The training programme contains both the theory and practice of fundamental rights, including specific training on protecting vulnerable groups, the principle of non-refoulement, and facilitating access to international protection at the border. The competences are assessed during the modules and final exercises, as well as during the experiential learning phases at the external border organised throughout the training programme.

To develop competences in taking responsibility for a specific range of border and coast guards' tasks, a member of the EBCG SC cat. 1 after graduation of the BTP undergoes a profile training and additionally may attend a leadership/management training or specialised according to the individual training map and based on recognised prior learning.

After successfully completing the BTP or EBTP, the EBCG SC cat.1 member has knowledge and understanding of and is able, with executive powers when applicable, to:

- a defined range of EU and international legislation, policies and procedures related to the powers and tasks of the EBCG SC cat. 1 at land, sea, and air border, including return;
- maintain physical and mental fitness to be able to perform BCG operational tasks;
- use tactical and force measures and firearms under pressure proportionate to a threat, as a last resort, after every reasonable effort has been made to resolve a situation using non-violent means, including by means of persuasion, negotiation, or mediation;
- perform a limited range of basic sea border surveillance-related tasks;
- ensure the respect of fundamental rights in all circumstances;
- perform tasks successfully, demonstrating professional development, as well as values, and ethical behaviour of the SC cat.1, in the field of border and coast guard activities providing added value to the national BCG;
- carry out a wide range of first-line border checks and defined range of second line border checks at land borders, airports, and seaports independently;
- perform border surveillance tasks at land borders and airports, and respond to regular situations independently, and to complex situations as a member of a team;
- act as the first law enforcement officer at a crime scene, carry out non-complex detection measures independently and provide support in more complex cross-border crime investigations;
- perform a limited range of return-related tasks as a member of a team in non-complex, routine situations in the ground support related tasks.

The European dimension of the EBCG SC cat.1 training is emphasized by legal and ethical Agency's responsibilities to ensure that standing corps officers are well trained and fully prepared to perform tasks with executive powers and use of force (Articles 55 (7), 82 and Annex V of the Regulation). It must be admitted that Basic Training for the EBCG SC cat.1 exercised the Agency's common core curriculum not only by developing the BTP for its own law enforcement officers based on it, but also and foremost by putting in practice the human interoperability component in the field of training. The implementation of the Basic Training for the EBCG SC cat.1 requires active involvement of MSs national trainers to embed the learners into common European border and coast guard culture, values, and attitudes, to set the

real example of interoperability and cooperation and finally to share the best practices for the sake of our common safety and security.

The common culture and promoted values, and feeling of being united does not come automatically, as granted. It must be planned, it must be a visible aim, and the learning methods must support its achievement, it must be considered in all training, and the delivery must be monitored and taken the care of at every step. Furthermore, the common understanding of the core values, tasks, and duties in terms of ensuring security and safety of the borders requires strong engagement of higher management, setting the excellency example and providing constant support.

That is the challenge and the uniqueness of the Basic Training for the EBCG SC cat.1 which is developed and implemented thanks to strong cooperation of all the stakeholders, including higher management, and thanks to shared responsibility for successful training process.

## **Conclusions**

The training activities facilitate the achievement of the Agency's mission and strategic objectives set for our common vision, "The European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice". Frontex supports the MSs to achieve an efficient, high, and uniform level of border control, and develops capacities to tackle challenges focusing on migration flows. The Agency contributes to the fight against serious cross-border crime and terrorism at the external borders. Its mission in the field of training is to provide border and coast guards with quality learning to ensure harmonised operational competences for integrated border management. In all its activities, a common European approach is emphasised, focusing on full compliance with fundamental rights and the highest standards.

On the path career the very first training is often perceived as return on expectations. Regarding the EBCG SC cat.1 officers of the first European formation, the expectations are high on each side: officers, society, management, trainers. Nowadays, the EBCG SC cat.1 officers are on the EU borders. Based on the feedback (no research done yet) and statistics of deployment, they provide the added value to the Member States, fully respecting fundamental rights in all actions, and ensuring the EU border security. It can be said that the methods applied, and the approach taken worked. However, it should be noticed, taking into consideration the specific character of the BCG training, that the process has just started, and it will be developing to ensure the safety and security by professionally trained

European border and coast guards. *Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment.* - we need to invest to guarantee them, and that investment starts with training.

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