



Unprecedented number of detections of illegal border-crossing in 2015

Based on preliminary data¹, in 2015, Member States reported more than 1 800 000 detections of illegal border-crossing along the external borders. This never-before-seen figure was more than five times the number of detections reported in 2014, which was itself an unprecedented year, with record monthly averages observed since April 2014. The year 2015 began with extremely high levels for the month of January (more than 20 000 detections, against the 2009–2014 January average of 4 700 detections), and each subsequent month set a new monthly record. In June, a turning point was reached with more than 100 000 detections, coinciding with a change in the law in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia allowing migrants to legalise their stay for a 72-hour period after they express a wish to apply for international protection. It resulted in a further increase of the flow and throughout the summer months scenes of chaos from the border areas spoke of a situation that looked like out of control. In September, public bus and train services were requisitioned, in Western Balkan countries and in some Member States, but the flow continued to grow until October. As of November, the situation eased a little, but the total for December, at over 214 000 detections, was still higher than the figure for the entire 2013.

At the onset of 2016, there is no end in sight to the factors putting people on the move. Potential migrants remain attracted to the EU as a destination and by the success stories sent home by the increasing numbers of those who have managed to enter the EU. Within the EU, Member States still have to face many challenges to restore the control of the external border in a sustainable manner. In previous years, detections increased around spring time, when

¹ The data presented here are based on monthly data reported by Member States between January and November and estimates for the month of December based on Frontex Joint Operations, whenever possible. The annual compilation of Member States' data will be presented in the Annual Risk Analysis 2016.

better weather conditions made it easier to cross. It is only then that it will be possible to assess whether the situation this year has changed to any significant degree.

There is no EU system capable of tracing people's movements following an illegal border-crossing. Therefore it is not possible to establish the number of persons who have illegally crossed two sections of the external borders of the EU. Only an estimate of **about 1 000 000 persons** can be provided, based on the assumption that all migrants first detected irregularly crossing in Greece were then detected for a second time entering from the Western Balkans. This is a strong assumption tak-

ing into account that large flows also increase the likelihood of non-detection and imprecise reporting.

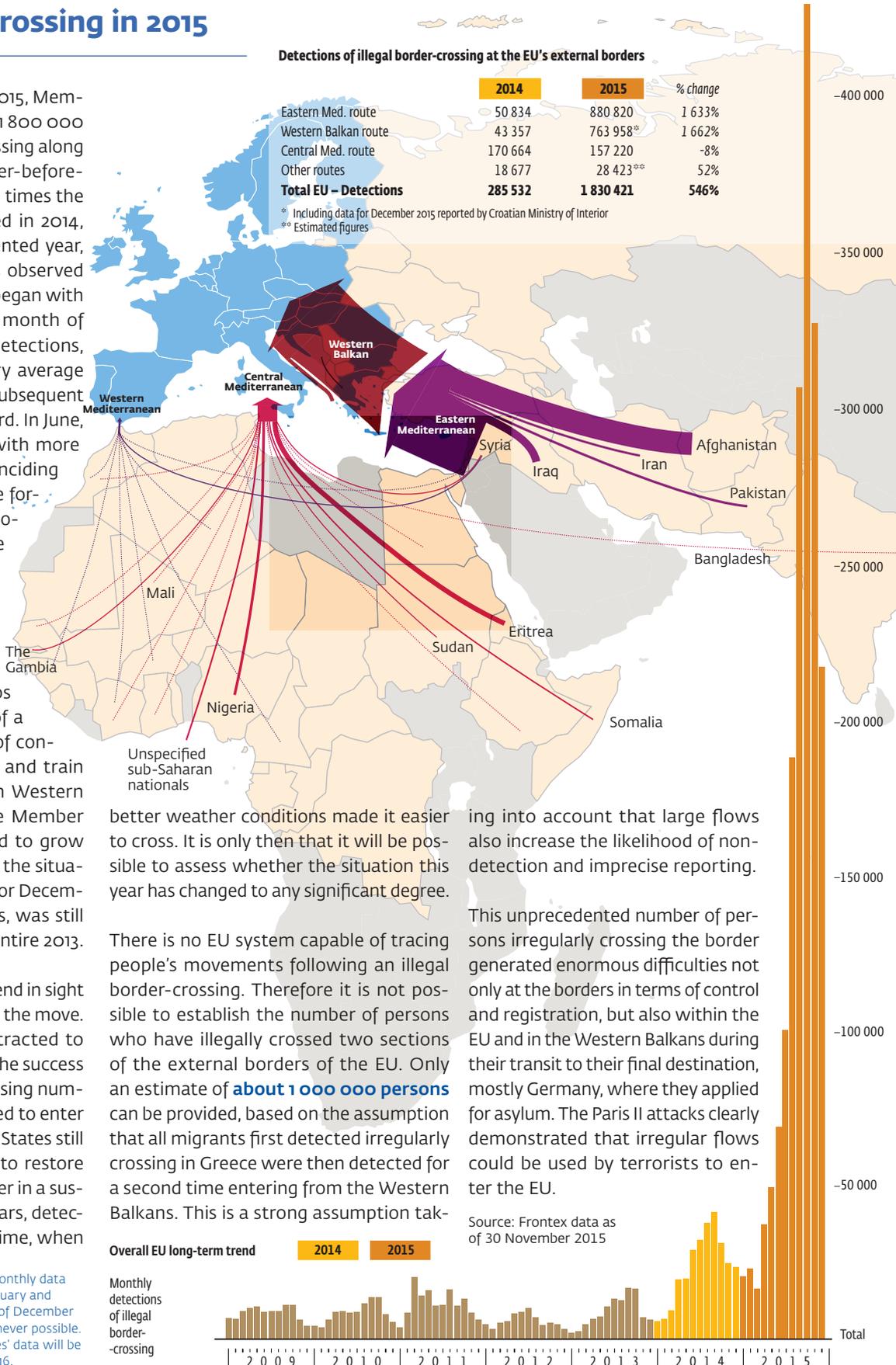
This unprecedented number of persons irregularly crossing the border generated enormous difficulties not only at the borders in terms of control and registration, but also within the EU and in the Western Balkans during their transit to their final destination, mostly Germany, where they applied for asylum. The Paris II attacks clearly demonstrated that irregular flows could be used by terrorists to enter the EU.

Source: Frontex data as of 30 November 2015

Detections of illegal border-crossing at the EU's external borders

	2014	2015	% change
Eastern Med. route	50 834	880 820	1 633%
Western Balkan route	43 357	763 958**	1 662%
Central Med. route	170 664	157 220	-8%
Other routes	18 677	28 423***	52%
Total EU – Detections	285 532	1 830 421	546%

* Including data for December 2015 reported by Croatian Ministry of Interior
 ** Estimated figures



Routes

The largest number of detections was reported on the **Eastern Mediterranean route** (880 820), mostly between Turkey and the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea. However, few applied for asylum in Greece and instead left Greece at the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and continued through the **Western Balkans**, initially at the Hungarian border with Serbia, where they applied for asylum and then continued to their final destination in the EU. As of mid-September, the flow shifted towards the Croatian border with Serbia, following the building of a temporary technical obstacle in Hungary and the establishment of transit areas for immediate processing of asylum applicants with the possibility of return to Serbia.

In contrast, on the **Central Mediterranean route**, the number of detections of illegal border-crossing has been about 157 000, a slight decrease compared to last year, but this figure remains larger than the total number of detections recorded for the EU as a whole in 2011, the year of the Arab Spring (141 051). The decrease is due to a decrease of Syrians (about 40 000 in 2014, and approx. 7 600 in 2015) after a shift towards the Eastern Mediterranean route. However, the number of Eastern and Western Africans steadily increased from less than 80 000 in 2014 to more than 105 000 in 2015 (+30%). This increase indicates that this route also faces very strong pressures and migrants continue to arrive in Libya, where smugglers have established a strong foothold and exploit the presence of vessels used for search and rescue operations into their planning.

On the **Western Mediterranean route**, the cooperation between Spain and Morocco is key in maintaining detections on the land route between Morocco and Spain at a relatively low level. As a result, sub-Saharan migrants opt for taking the sea route towards Spain increasingly tend to depart from Libya, as the likelihood of being returned after reaching Italy is, for some nationalities, lower than in Spain.

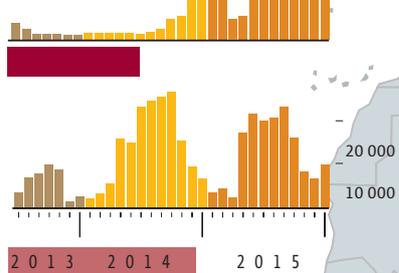
On the **Western African route**, which connects Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco with the Spanish Canary Islands after a treacherous journey on the Atlantic Ocean,

the numbers remain negligible despite an increasing trend of departures from Morocco. This low number is attributed to the joint surveillance activities and effective return of those detected irregularly crossing the border.

On the **Eastern land border**, a new route emerged at the land borders of Norway and Finland with the Russian Federation (the so-called **Arctic route**). The main targeted border crossing point (BCP) was the Norwegian BCP of Storskog that regis-

tered an unusually high number of applications for asylum in 2015 (over 6 200). The situation in Norway eased in December, when the Russian Federation resumed its practice of prevention of exit of travellers not in possession of an adequate travel document to continue to the EU. This phenomenon, albeit temporary and well-managed, illustrates the key role of collaboration with neighbouring third countries in the management of the control at the external borders and also its intrinsic limitations.

Detections of illegal border-crossing at the EU's external borders by routes, 2013–2015



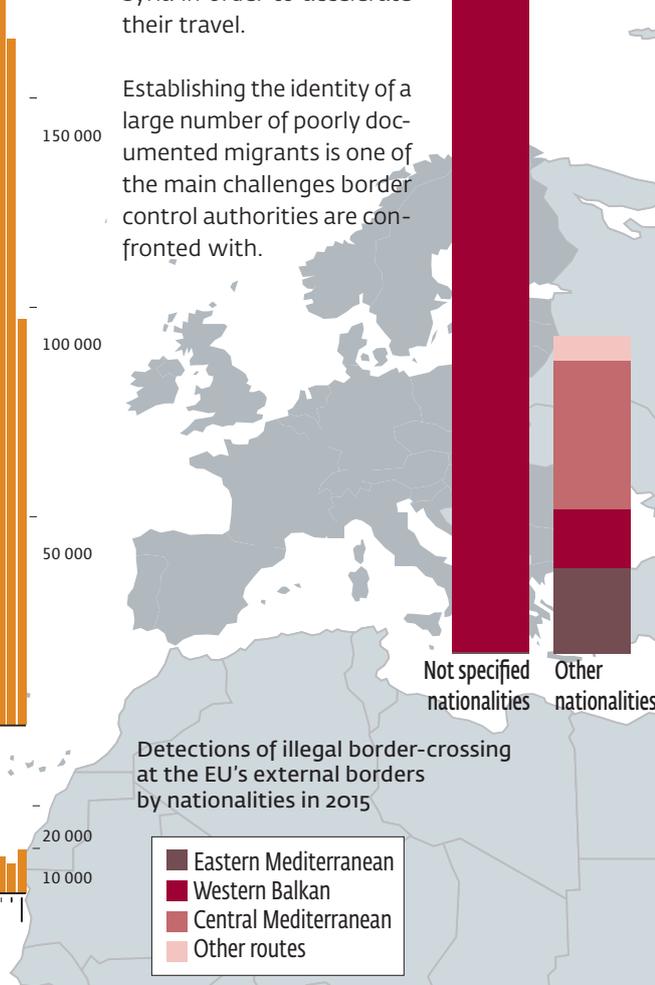
Nationalities

Citizens declaring coming from **Syria** (598 091) and **Afghanistan** (266 554) represented the highest share of migrants irregularly entering the EU in 2015. The vast majority arrived from Turkey to Greece while only approximately 7 600 Syrians and 118 Afghans were reported on the Central Mediterranean route.

Few applied for asylum in Greece, but did so in Hungary before continuing to other Member States, mostly Germany, where they again applied for asylum. Syrians and Afghans were also among the main nationalities reported at many EU airports entering with fraudulent documents or detected staying illegally in EU Member States and subsequently applying for asylum. While Syrians undeniably constitute the largest proportion of migrants, their exact number is difficult to establish due to the fact that many other migrants also claim to be from Syria in order to accelerate their travel.

Establishing the identity of a large number of poorly documented migrants is one of the main challenges border control authorities are confronted with.

Detections of illegal border-crossing at the EU's external borders by nationalities in 2015

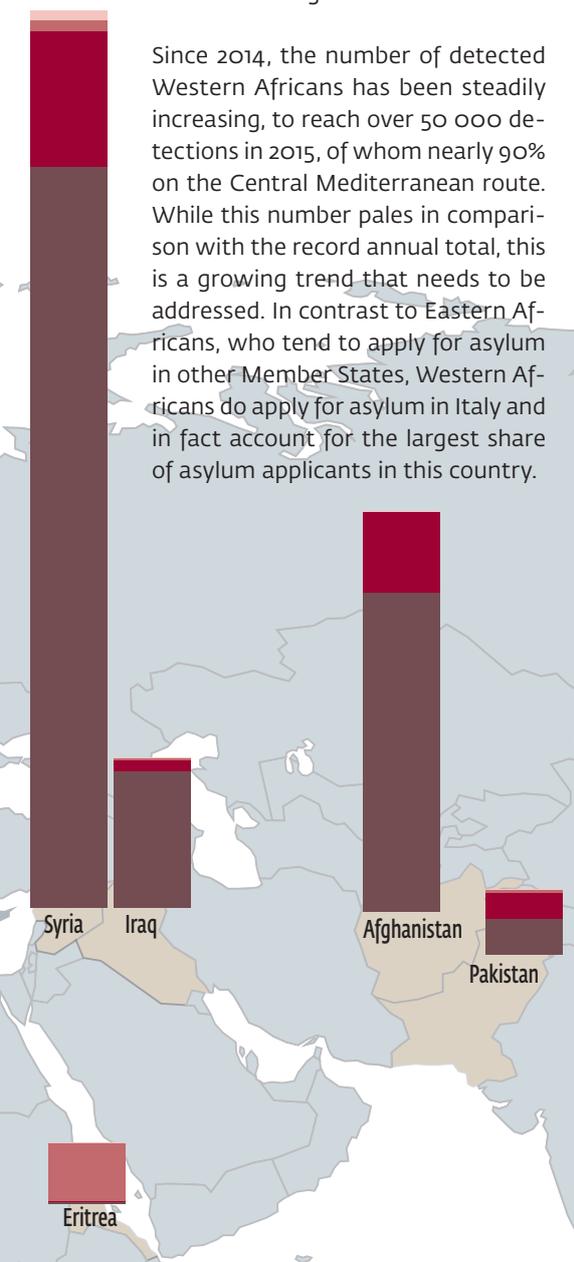


ANNUAL BRIEF 2015

Eritreans ranked first among migrants arriving on the Central Mediterranean route, with 38 876 detections, or 25% of the route's total. However, considering regional totals, Western Africans (56 258) represented the largest share of migrants arriving on this route.

The unprecedented number of detections of illegal border-crossing also meant that in several Member States the authorities were not able to ascertain the identity and to register the persons arriving. Thus, the category '**not specified nationality**', including data not available by nationality and Stateless, represented about 30% of the total detections for illegal border-crossing.

Since 2014, the number of detected Western Africans has been steadily increasing, to reach over 50 000 detections in 2015, of whom nearly 90% on the Central Mediterranean route. While this number pales in comparison with the record annual total, this is a growing trend that needs to be addressed. In contrast to Eastern Africans, who tend to apply for asylum in other Member States, Western Africans do apply for asylum in Italy and in fact account for the largest share of asylum applicants in this country.



Key challenges arising from the 2015 crisis

The EU's external border has been subject to intense migratory pressure for years. The massive growth in detections of illegal border-crossing has revealed that

border authorities are not sufficiently equipped to deal with such large flows

and that local authorities, under these circumstances, face enormous difficulties to adequately perform border controls and apply EU legislation. While Greece and Italy have been under particularly intense pressure as the two main entry points reporting several thousand arrivals per day, the large-scale inflows of migrants have been a new experience for several other Member States. The main challenges include the widening of the surveillance areas, the growing need for and the extension of search and rescue operations, the lack of facilities to receive and accommodate thousands of persons over a short time and expertise to detect non-typical travel documents, difficulties in addressing fraudulent declaration of nationality or age, the non-systematic entry of finger-printing into the Eurodac. Last but not least, is that the aspect of

registration at the borders should more thoroughly take into account the risks to internal security.

The Paris II attacks in November 2015 clearly demonstrated that

irregular flows could be used by terrorists to enter the EU.

Two of the terrorists involved had previously irregularly entered through Leros and had been registered by the Greek authorities, presenting Syrian fraudulent documents to speed up their registration process.

As the vast majority of migrants arrive undocumented, screening activities are essential to properly verify their declaration of nationality.

False declarations of nationality are rife among nationals who are unlikely to obtain asylum in the EU

or who are liable to be returned to their country of origin or transit, or who perceived an advantage in speeding up their journey. With large numbers of arrivals remaining essentially doubtful for a variety of reasons – false or lack of identification documents, concerns over the validity of a claimed nationality etc. – with no thorough check nor penalty for those making such false declarations, there is a risk that some persons representing a security threat for the EU will take advantage of this situation.

The EU is also implementing a Hot Spot approach. The purpose of this is to ensure full registration and identification of arrivals to ensure that those who require protection will have it and those who do not have the right to remain are swiftly returned. Furthermore, it is proposed to enhance the effectiveness of voluntary return programmes supported by EU-funding as well as more swift national procedures including reinforced detention to effectively implement readmission by way of Member States measures and their bilateral cooperation with countries of origin. This should be complemented and facilitated by proposed legal amendments, for instance to enhance the use of SIS and EURODAC for return related purposes.

The unprecedented number of detections of illegal border-crossing has also led to a surge in violent incidents along the EU's external borders. Motivated by profit,

people smugglers increasingly put migrants' lives at risk

and even threaten border guards to recover boats or escape apprehension. Large numbers of people crossing the border *en masse* has led to violence requiring public

order policing, i.e. a task for which border control authorities are neither adequately equipped nor trained.

It is dauntingly difficult to estimate fatalities among migrants irregularly crossing the border because it is not possible to keep an accurate tally of missing persons. Frontex does not record these data and can only report the number of bodies recovered during Joint Operations. In 2015, 470 dead bodies were reported in the Mediterranean area, an increase of 112% compared to 2014. According to IOM estimates, more than 3 770 persons went missing or died in the Mediterranean area in 2015.

The highest number of casualties were reported in the Central Mediterranean, followed by the maritime area between the Turkish coast and the Greek islands. In addition, the large demand for smuggling services has also led unscrupulous smugglers to resorting to dangerous methods of clandestine transportation, which has resulted in a series of fatal accidents of migrants hiding in vehicles. However, the most dangerous route, i.e. the Western African route from Senegal and Mauritania to the Spanish Canary Islands, remained essentially closed thanks to the good col-

laboration of the Spanish authorities with those in origin countries, in terms of police cooperation and returns.

In a situation of continued pressure on EU external borders, it is presumed that these challenges will be best addressed in a co-ordinated manner, requiring harmonised applications of legislations and pooling of resources. In this sense, the Commission tabled a proposed to established an European Border and Coast Guard Agency. In addition, efforts should be pursued in the area of returns. Indeed, in its European Agenda on Migration, the Commission states that

'one of the incentives for irregular migrants is the knowledge that the EU's return system – meant to return irregular migrants or those whose asylum applications have been refused – works imperfectly.'

The Commission has proposed several key actions in this regard, including to reinforce and strengthen Frontex' s role on return, as well as a proposal for the development of an EU-wide list of safe countries of origin.

Illegal border-crossings between BCPs	TOTAL 2014	2015												TOTAL 2015
		JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC*	
TOTAL EU	283 532	20 602	23 710	18 069	40 069	54 559	75 525	118 107	189 791	309 640	434 473	328 387	217 489	1 830 421
Syria	79169	3 150	3 213	7 627	12 536	16 019	26 490	55 574	116 090	136 510	111 922	67 482	41 478	598 091
Not specified**	366	4	38	60	76	70	86	15	72	91 032	204 306	163 688	97 784	557 231
Afghanistan	22132	1 872	1 793	3 197	5 714	9 831	15 477	24 010	29 891	38 315	66 116	44 454	25 884	266 554
Iraq	2110	263	401	897	1 246	1 572	2 503	3 288	5 747	14 764	23 233	19 125	26 472	99 511
Pakistan	4059	177	311	575	1 543	2 376	4 130	7 091	8 889	5 483	3 445	5 456	3 735	43 211
Eritrea	34586	254	672	155	4 605	7 206	7 169	6 434	5 243	4 810	2 525	346	1 015	40 434
Iran	468	67	68	116	150	229	358	661	894	1 983	7 316	9 318	3 518	24 678
Nigeria	8715	140	475	473	2 116	2 288	3 642	3 685	3 603	2 901	1 771	1 221	1 858	24 173
Kosovo***	22069	10 371	11 880	380	280	140	95	127	146	118	136	72	33	23 778
Somalia	7676	524	800	340	3 056	1 659	1 762	1 538	1 743	1 811	1 862	1 269	1 527	17 891
Other		3 780	4 059	4 249	8 747	13 169	13 813	15 684	17 473	11 913	11 841	15 956	14 185	134 869

Source: FRAN (2014 and Jan-Nov 2015), JORA (December 2015) and the Croatian Ministry of Interior as of 11 January 2016

* Includes data not available by nationality reported by Croatia at the border with Serbia.

** December 2015 figures are available only from operational data, not validated and subject to change. Also please note that they are not fully comparable with previous months.

*** This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Disclaimer: Frontex provides monthly data on the number of people detected at the external borders of the European Union. Irregular border crossings may be attempted by the same person several times in different locations at the external border. This means that a large number of the people who were counted when they arrived in Greece were again counted when entering the EU for the second time through Hungary or Croatia.