

Concepts of border security in the EU and the US: a comparative view

- Abstract -

Things seem so similar, but are yet so different!

Looking at the US and the EU as major players not only in the Transatlantic Region but also as economic superpowers and preferred immigration destinations world-wide, we would find at first sight, that both stand out by very similar features. The US has Mexico and the rest of Latin America to its south, for the EU it is the eastern neighbours with the entire Asian continent behind, while further migratory pressure starts to emerge from the Mediterranean south. A long land border of approx. 7,000 miles and a still longer sea border to take care of, which several hundred million regular travellers keep crossing year by year.

With all this superficial harmony, it is easy to forget the rest and ignore the striking differences. While terrorism represents the main concern for United States entry controls, it is illegal migration for the Europeans; while the US can rely on 200+ years of tradition, including stable borders and a single border protection agency providing service „from coast to coast“, the EU is still in full evolution in terms of members, borders, neighbors (practically with every enlargement, the Union gets a new guardian of its borders!). Despite growing coherence, the EU external border still consists of a patchwork of national segments, each with its own staff, strategies and equipment, all painstakingly coordinated by the border agency FRONTEX.

It is with some consolation that the Europeans noticed the unexpected problems the US encountered with the completion of its „Mexican fence“ as well as the ultimate completion of US-VISIT. It is all the more surprising that Europe still considers to build its eastern and southern defences along the lines of the US model, which includes strategy, technology ... and possibly fences, as we can see from the current Greek-Turkish example.

This raises some questions as to the sense of Transatlantic learning: is it really wise to learn from each other? Probably yes, but not in the sense of a 1:1 copy of approaches.

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