

Significant Cases of Global Arms Trade

French frigate for Greek Navy

Key Data:

Years: 2021-2022

Involved Countries: France, Greece

Weapon Systems: Belharra Frigates

Arms Producers: Naval Group in Lorient

Perpetrators/Involved Parties: President Macron

Victims/Affected:

The Belharra arms deal between France and Greece involves the procurement of advanced frigates for the Hellenic Navy. Under the agreement, France will deliver three state-of-the-art Belharra frigates to Greece, with the option of a fourth vessel. The deal is reported to be worth around €5 billion [1]. The signing ceremony for the deal took place on March 25, 2022, aboard the "Battleship Georgios Averof" in Paleo Faliro, a coastal suburb south of Athens [2].

This agreement signifies a strategic defense partnership between Greece and France [3]. It aims to strengthen European defense autonomy and enhance Greece's naval capabilities. The acquisition of the Belharra frigates is part of Greece's broader efforts to modernize its armed forces. The frigates will contribute to Greece's maritime security and defense capabilities in the Mediterranean region [4].

The Belharra frigates are being constructed by Naval Group, the main contractor, under a €2.26 billion agreement between Greece and France [6]. These vessels belong to the FDI (Frigate de Défense et d'Intervention) Belharra class and are equipped with advanced technologies and systems for conducting naval operations.

While the primary focus of the Belharra frigates is enhancing Greece's naval defense capabilities, their role in border security for Europe and potential involvement in illegal pushbacks is not directly addressed in the available research results. It's important to note that the specific operational deployment and use of these frigates will depend on the strategic objectives and policies set by Greece within the context of European and international law.

Regarding the growing tensions between Greece and Turkey, the acquisition of the Belharra frigates by Greece has been seen as a move to strengthen Greece's defense capabilities and assert its rights in the region. France has supported Greece's rights and sent warships to the region to challenge Turkey. The acquisition of advanced naval vessels like the Belharra frigates can contribute to Greece's deterrence and defense posture in the face of regional tensions.

In summary, the Belharra arms deal between France and Greece involves the acquisition of advanced frigates, enhancing Greece's naval capabilities and contributing to its maritime

security. The agreement signifies a strategic defense partnership and aims to strengthen European defense autonomy.

Commentary

According to our research results, several international organizations and stakeholders have condemned pushbacks carried out at the EU's external borders, highlighting concerns about excessive use of force, degrading treatment, and arbitrary detention of migrants [9][10]. European courts have ruled that pushbacks are illegal in certain cases, such as those involving Italy in 2012 and Hungary in 2020. The European Commission has also acknowledged the illegality of pushbacks while emphasizing the need to protect EU borders [13].

Within EU territory, pushbacks are generally considered illegal, as they can violate the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning individuals to a country where they may face persecution, torture, or other serious harm [11]. However, outside EU waters, pushbacks may occur within a legal gray area, as the application of international law and human rights standards can be less clear.

The legal opinions on pushbacks at the EU border depend on various factors, including the specific circumstances, locations, and practices involved. International human rights law, EU law, and relevant treaties and conventions play a significant role in assessing the legality of pushbacks. Additionally, the principle of proportionality is crucial in determining whether the use of force during pushbacks is justified and compliant with international legal standards.

It's important to note that pushbacks are a highly debated topic, and different perspectives exist regarding their legality and effectiveness as a border control measure. The legality of pushbacks can be subject to interpretation, and cases may need to be assessed on an individual basis considering the specific facts and legal context.

In summary, while pushbacks at the EU border have faced condemnation and legal challenges from international organizations and stakeholders, their legality is a complex issue. Pushbacks within EU territory are generally considered illegal, as they may violate the principle of non-refoulement. However, the situation outside EU waters and the specific circumstances of each case can influence the legal assessment

Additional Information / Sources

[1] "Sep 28, 2021 · Under the terms of the deal, which Greek media are reporting to be worth €5bn, France will deliver three state-of-the art Belharra frigates to Greece by 2025, with the option of a fourth warship ..."

URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/28/greece-to-buy-french-warships-in-multi-billion-euro-defence-deal>

[2] "Mar 25, 2022 · Greece and France signed on Thursday the deal for the procurement by the Hellenic Navy of three Belharra frigates, with an option for a fourth. The signing ceremony was held onboard the " Battleship Georgios Averof ", permanently docked as a museum at Paleo Faliro, the coastal suburb south of Athens."

URL: <https://greekreporter.com/2022/03/25/greece-france-ink-frigates-deal/>

[3] "Sep 28, 2021 · Athens, Greece – Greece has announced a deal to buy between six and eight French-built warships accompanied by a strategic defence partnership with France, a move the Greek prime minister said ..."

URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/28/greece-france-tout-european-defence-autonomy-with-warships-deal>

[4] "Oct 3, 2021 · France sided with Greece's rights, sending warships to the region to challenge Turkey in a move that enraged President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Under the new deal, France will come to Greece's ..."

URL: <https://www.voanews.com/a/greece-france-seal-strategic-defense-deal-angering-turkey-/6255367.html>

[5] "Feb 16, 2022 · Greece ratified a major arms agreement with France late on Tuesday which includes the purchase of three frigates and six new Rafale fighter jets to an existing order for 18 aircraft. The National Defense Ministry's bill was approved by Parliament."

URL: <https://greekreporter.com/2022/02/16/greece-frigates-jets-france/>

[6] "Jul 21, 2022 · A render of two different Belharra class frigates built for the French and Greek navies / From Naval Group. Under a €2.26 billion (\$2.53 billion) agreement struck by Greece and France, three FDI BELHARRA class frigates are being constructed for the Hellenic Navy under the main contractor Naval Group."

URL: <https://www.overtdefense.com/2022/07/21/naval-group-begins-construction-of-greeces-2nd-fdi-belharra-class-frigate/>

[7] "Oct 1, 2021 · The Guardian reports the deal will see France delivering three state-of-the-art Belharra frigates to Greece by 2025, with the option of a fourth warship also on offer."

URL: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211001-greece-signs-5-8bn-arms-deal-with-france/>

[8] "Mar 25, 2022 · Greece and France signed a new arms deal on Thursday with Athens to buy three Belharra frigates and six more Rafale fighter jets. The Rafale fighter jets will be sold to Greece by Dassault Aviation and would be delivered from the summer of 2024, bringing the Hellenic Air Force's fleet to 24 Rafales, the French warplane maker said ..."

URL: <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2022/03/25/greece-and-france-sign-newdeal-frigates-rafale-deal-worth-4-billion-euros/>

[9] "Several international organisations and other stakeholders have condemned or filed legal actions against the practice of pushbacks carried out at the EU's external borders. In September 2020, the European Commission presented a pact on migration and asylum, including a proposal on pre-entry screening of third-country nationals at EU ..."

URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)689368](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)689368)

[10] "report cases of pushbacks at the European Union's land and sea borders. According to those reports , pushbacks often involve excessive use of force by EU Member States authorities and EU agencies ' operating at external borders, and degrading and inhuman treatment of migrants and their arbitrary detention."

URL:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689368/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)689368_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689368/EPRS_BRI(2021)689368_EN.pdf)

[11] "Are EU countries legally allowed to turn away refugees at sea? Within European Union territory no, but outside those waters yes."

URL: <https://www.dw.com/en/european-refugee-policy-are-pushbacks-at-sea-legal/a-54080544>

[12] "Between May and September 2021, investigative journalists from several European countries filmed so-called pushbacks at five locations along the Bosnian-Croatian border. The footage documents 11 ..."

URL: <https://www.dw.com/en/when-are-pushbacks-at-the-eus-external-borders-illegal/a-59442530>

[13] "European courts have upheld the illegality of pushbacks, specifically in cases involving Italy in 2012 and Hungary in 2020. And members of the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, have acknowledged this, even when speaking about the need to protect EU borders. "Pushbacks are clearly illegal."

URL: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/01/09/EU-pushbacks-legal-asylum>

[14] "In what way do these national laws on pushbacks of illegal immigrants contradict the European Treaties, when they respect the sovereignty and the wishes of Member States? 2. Does the freedom of movement of migrants take precedence over the protection of EU Member States' borders? 3."

URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005233_EN.html

[15] "The statement comes in response to a call from 12 EU member states that says all external borders "must be protected with maximum level of security" and essentially calls for the legalisation of pushbacks, EU funding for border walls, and measures to respond to "a hybrid attack characterised by an artificial"

URL: <https://www.statewatch.org/news/2021/october/pushbacks-legalising-the-illegal-cannot-be-permitted-says-council-of-europe-human-rights-chief/>

[16] "fundamental rights in their activities to protect the external borders. Several international EU's organisations and other stakeholders have condemned or filed legal actions against the practice of pushbacks carried out at the EU's external borders. In September 2020, the European Commission"

URL:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/738191/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)738191_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/738191/EPRS_BRI(2022)738191_EN.pdf)

[17] "A new report, including disturbing video and audio evidence, shows security forces along European Union borders detaining migrants and asylum seekers at secret locations before forcing them back ..."

URL: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/08/eu-should-stop-illegal-migrant-pushbacks-its-borders>

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