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Borderline: Frontiers of Peace

Valerio Vincenzo

I would like you to embrace the images of this project, to be ready to protect the open-mindedness of these landscapes so that we can pass on these borders of peace to future generations.

About the portfolio

From Portugal to Bulgaria, from Finland to Greece, photographer Valerio Vincenzo zigzagged along the length of nearly 20,000 kilometers of borders between the countries that are part of the European Union and/or the Schengen Area. Considering Europe's history over the 19th and 20th centuries, full of scars, walls and trenches, these images document a silent revolution. Barely sixty years ago, the Schengen Area was merely a utopian notion. This photographic work shows a utopia that has become reality. Europe received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 for such an achievement. The Nobel Committee stated, 'The union and its forerunners have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.'

Today, the final words of this statement are being called into question, as indeed are the construction of Europe and the Schengen Area, too. Is Europe caught in a dilemma between its values and the pragmatic difficulty of enforcing them? Will the images included in this project end up relegated to history books, witnesses to a bygone age?

Borderline, Frontiers of Peace was awarded the 2013 Louise Weiss Prize for European Journalism, the first time that such an award has been granted to a photo project. The project has been exhibited numerous times, notably at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 2015, St. Petersburg (Russia) in 2016, Brest and Orléans (France), Zagreb and Vukovar (Croatia) in 2017, Sarajevo (Bosnia & Herzegovina) and the fortress of Salses (France) in 2018, Amiens (France), Berlin and Bamberg (Germany) in 2019, Tallinn (Estonia) and Lübeck (Germany) in 2020, and Strasbourg (France) and Cuneo (Italy) in 2021. Valerio Vincenzo is currently extending his project to the now peaceful borders of the Balkans.

About the photographer

Valerio Vincenzo has been Italian since 1973 and French since 2014 and is currently based in Paris. Trained as an economist, he was a business strategy consultant and NGO administrator before becoming a freelance photographer in 2004. He works for the press (including *Geo* and *Le Monde*) as well as public and private institutions, while also diving into a number of artistic projects. He is the founder of the association Borderline, Frontiers of Peace, which organizes not only the photo exhibitions of the eponymous project but also workshops in schools across Europe. His book is *Borderline, Frontiers of Peace* (Lannoo Publishing, Tiel, Belgium, 2017). Learn more at his websites valeriovincenzo.com and en.frontiersofpeace.com.



Poland–Germany border, between Swinoujscie and Seebad Heringsdorf, 2012. The border between Poland and Germany, established after World War II, was officially ratified only in 1991. In contrast to the peaceful place it is today, in 1996 this was still the most heavily patrolled border in Europe, with an average of 2.4 agents every kilometre. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Austria–Czech Republic border between Neu Nagelberg and Halámky, 2011. After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, the Czechs could enter Austria as free citizens for the first time in 40 years. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Poland-Czech Republic border, Polish-Czech Friendship Trail next to Szrenica, Karkonosze National Park, 2012. This curious rock formation, Twaroznik, has an even stranger border pole on top of the rock. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Greece-Bulgaria border, next to Kushla, 2014.

Greece is in the background, Bulgaria in the foreground. As Bulgaria has not yet joined the Schengen Area, this border is still patrolled today, though it is no longer the highly militarized Iron Curtain border that it was until 1991. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Italy-Switzerland border, Gobba di Rollin, 2008. At 3899 meters above sea level, the poles in the picture are in Switzerland, just a few meters from the border, to prevent skiers from ending up in the ravine on the Italian side. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Germany–Austria border, Zugspitze, 2012. At 2962 meters high, the Zugspitze, at the border between Germany and Austria, is the highest mountain in Germany. It is a popular tourist destination both in summer and in winter. In this picture, a group of tourists is walking on the exact borderline between the two countries. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Portugal–Spain border, between Campo Maior (Portugal) and Badajoz (Spain), 2010. The Spain–Portugal border is the oldest European border, having remained almost completely unchanged since the thirteenth century. Border markers present a problem for farmers. When their crops grow, farmers cannot always see the poles from their machines. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Germany–France border, view from Fleckenstein castle, 2007. The Fleckenstein castle stands in what was once a long-disputed area between France and Germany. Destroyed by French troops under Louis XIV, it is located today in France. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Latvia-Estonia border, between Ainazi and Ikla, 2010. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Slovakia–Czech Republic, Kohútka, 2015. The Czech Republic–Slovakia border is one of the youngest in Europe. It was established in 1993 as a result of the Velvet Revolution. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



France–Switzerland border, D23 road north of Biederthal, 2007. On this secondary road that leads from one country to the other, the yellow spot on the pavement is the only visible sign of the border between these two countries. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Ireland–United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) borderline, Fane River, between Maghernakill (Ireland) and Cullaville (United Kingdom), 2013. The border between Ireland and the United Kingdom, which is based upon county lines from the seventeenth century, is unique in that often there are no signs letting travellers know that they are crossing a border. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.



Finland Sweden border, Kukkola on the Torne River, 2013. After World War II, Scandinavia became a precursor of freedom of circulation in Europe with the Nordic Passport Union, established in 1952. All rights reserved © Valerio Vincenzo.