



The Centre for
Cross Border Studies

MEDIA WATCH

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EU poised to restrict passport-free travel

European Union countries are poised to restrict passport-free travel by invoking an emergency rule to impose controls at several borders for two more years because of the migration crisis, according to EU documents.

The switch will reverse a decades-old trend of expanding passport-free travel in Europe. Since 1995, people have been able to **cross borders** among Schengen Area member countries without document checks.

Each of the 26 countries in the Schengen Area is allowed to unilaterally put up border controls for a maximum of six months, but that time limit can be extended for up to two years if a member is found to be failing to protect its borders.

The documents show that EU policymakers are preparing to make unprecedented use of an emergency provision by declaring that Greece is failing to sufficiently protect its border. About 2,000 people are arriving daily on Greek islands in smugglers' boats from Turkey, most of them keen to move deeper into Europe to wealthier countries like Germany and Sweden.

In Brussels on Friday, EU nations acknowledged that the overall functioning of Schengen "is at serious risk" and said Greece must make further efforts to deal with the migrant crisis at its source.

European inspectors visited Greek border sites in November and gave Athens until early May to upgrade border management on its islands. Two draft assessments forwarded to the Greek government in early January indicated Athens was making progress, although they noted "important shortcomings" in handling migrant flows.

But with asylum-seekers still coming 10 times faster than in January last year, European countries are reluctant to dismantle their emergency border controls. If they keep them in place without authorisation, EU officials fear the entire concept of the open travel zone could be brought down.

A summary written by an official in the EU's Dutch presidency for a meeting of EU justice and home affairs ministers last month showed they decided that declaring Greece to have failed in its upgrade was "the only way" for Europe to extend the time for border

checks. The official said they agreed to invoke the two-year rule under Article 26 of the open travel agreement.

"With no decrease in migratory pressure and time running out, our ministers agreed ... that the only way to continue beyond the maximum time limit during which these border controls may be carried out is to adopt a (European) Council recommendation under Article 26 of the Schengen Border Code," the official wrote in an email.

The assessments of Greece became notably more negative.

In a January 27 report, marked "restricted", the EU Commission cited "serious deficiencies in the carrying out of external border controls", adding that "Greece is seriously neglecting its obligations".

In Friday's statement, the EU told Greece "that given the scale of the situation, further efforts are needed".

The EU wants Athens to improve screening and disembarkation procedures for those arriving by boat, and to increase its capacity to document and house asylum-seekers and build detention facilities for those facing deportation.

Greece says it has already addressed many of the European concerns. It has promised to complete new screening centres on four Greek islands and build two new transit camps within the next week, with the help of the country's armed forces.

So far, six Schengen members have imposed border checks, and many of those would have to dismantle them starting in mid-May under Schengen rules. Germany has until May 13, and has made clear that it does not want to relinquish the checks. The other countries are France, Austria, Denmark and Norway.

Source: The Belfast Telegraph

15 February 2016

Many Irish firms have no strategy to cope with Brexit

Irish firms are increasing

their scrutiny of Britain's European referendum as they weigh up the risks to their businesses from the prospect of a British exit from the European Union (Brexit). The firms believe it would be better for Britain to remain in the EU, a survey by *The Irish Times* suggests.

The survey comes ahead of a Brussels summit this week at which British prime minister David Cameron will press for a deal to recast Britain's membership of the union. Respondents cited concerns about the potential of a Brexit to disrupt economic growth, currency markets, financial markets, trade with Britain and **cross-Border** trade. They also expressed anxiety about increased costs from British suppliers and possible disruption to plans for capital investment, mergers and acquisitions.

Many said the matter was being assessed by their boards, with a response at strategic or corporate level under discussion in firms with large British operations or whose clients have such operations.

"Were Brexit to become a reality, there will likely be a period of extended volatility and uncertainty and that would likely be a significant headwind for the UK economy," said a big Irish firm that makes about half its profit in Britain.

However, in some cases board discussions were "general" or "informal".

Many firms do not have a strategy to deal with a Brexit.

Uncertain outlook

"We await the outcome of the concessions to be negotiated and are constantly reviewing this," said one firm, which has supply and retail operations.

Firms also said their assessments were limited by the uncertain outlook for the referendum and a lack of data about Britain's relationship with the EU if Brexit took place.

"This has been discussed at each board meeting over the last three months. However, it is regarded as an area that we cannot control and, therefore, is not high on our agenda," said a services firm with Irish and British operations.

A total of 21 Irish-owned and publicly-quoted firms submitted responses to the survey, which was carried out in recent weeks in a cross-section of sectors. The potential for an adverse impact on Irish businesses was widely acknowledged.

Source: The Irish Times

19 February 2016

Scottish minister urges Ireland to take part in referendum debate

Ireland is the only foreign state whose voice should be heard in the referendum on the UK's future in the European Union, a Scottish minister has said.

Humza Yousaf, a member of the Scottish National Party and Scotland's minister for Europe, said his advice to those across the continent who wanted the UK to remain in the EU was "to say nothing at all".

However, Ireland was the one exception to that rule.

"The Irish are seen as close friends, indeed our cousins," Mr Yousaf said. "Any support they give will be viewed positively, [if given] in a way that is genuine and sincere."

Speaking in Dundalk, Co Louth yesterday, Mr Yousaf said Irish voters could play a decisive role in the Brexit referendum, which is expected to take place in June. "All the polls suggest this is on a knife edge. You have 465,000 Irish citizens living in the UK. That could possibly swing it," he said at a conference on Brexit organised by the Centre for **Cross-Border** Studies.

Dragged out

Mr Yousaf suggested that if the UK voted to leave but a majority of Scottish voters wanted to stay in, being "dragged out of the EU against our will" could lead to another independence referendum.

Scottish first minister Nicola Sturgeon has said a second independence vote will take place only if there is public demand. "But this could be an issue that would create material change which could facilitate some of that demand," Mr Yousaf said.

Mary C Murphy, a lecturer in politics at University College Cork, said a British vote to leave would trigger political and economic instability, and could result in the value of sterling falling.

"In the most dire assessment, the future of the EU and European integration could be called into question," Dr Murphy said.

"In addition, Northern Ireland's capacity to influence a post-Brexit political and economic landscape is limited due to its size and political make-up," she said.

Paul Brennan, a British Labour MEP from the north of England, said the Northern Ireland peace process would be threatened in the event of a vote to leave.

He suggested there was a place in the referendum debate for US politicians, particularly those who were involved in the peace process.

It was not only Scotland that could be forced out of the EU against its will, he added.

It was possible that Scotland, Wales, the northern English border region, Yorkshire and London could vote to remain in the EU but that the UK overall would have a majority in favour of leaving.

"We're looking potentially at the Balkanisation of England," he said.

Source: The Irish Times