EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Migration meltdown

After a terrorist attack, a disastrous election result for the governing coalition in two eastern German states, and a very good result for the far-right AfD, the German government has adopted a plan to tighten border controls. In doing so, it has attracted much criticism and put the Schengen concept to the test. We feature reporting from Greece, Austria, Poland, and Sweden.

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Don’t go down that road

According to the Greek news outlet *Ta Nea*, Germany is amidst a major quagmire over its recent plans to tighten border controls in a bid to limit immigration. The plans include checking at the border whether another EU state is responsible for examining a request, and detaining these people in "facilities" near the border until the examination is complete. While the phrase "facilities near the border" conjures up horrific images of detention centres in other EU countries and in history, the German government says that it is only starting the so-called Dublin procedure at a rapid pace but is receiving heavy criticism from several sides for its plans. For Germany's conservative CDU party, the plans sadly do not go far enough, while others warn that they will cause serious friction with other Member States and lead to political unrest.

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Take ‘em back

Austrian newspaper *Die Presse* outlines the dispute between the German state of Bavaria and its neighbour Austria, which arose after the German government announced plans to increase their border controls to limit migration. The dispute arose after Austria's Interior Minister Karer, of the conservative ÖVP party, threatened not to take back migrants turned away by Germany at their common border. He also pointed out that refoulement is not allowed under the EU's internal border controls. Bavaria's interior minister, Joachim Herrmann of the CSU – the Bavarian branch of the conservative CDU – in turn criticised Karer's statement. He made it clear that the question was not whether Austria would take someone back, but whether Germany would refuse entry. And if Germany refuses someone entry, then that person is still in the neighbouring country and has not entered Germany. As amusing as their petty public spat may be, perhaps it would be better that refugees are not used as pawns by politicians in their quest to regain popularity.

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The break-up

Amongst the loudest in the chorus of European criticism towards Germany’s border controls are the Polish, namely Prime Minister Donald Tusk, writes *Notes from Poland*. Tusk calls the law “unacceptable,” identifying it as a reflection of domestic German politics rather than EU policy and values; he is taking it to the EU level to discuss with other Member States how to address this “de facto suspension of Schengen” that utilises a state-of-emergency loophole to bypass the EU’s freedom of movement. Tusk knows what he’s talking about – Poland has had a surge of illegal border crossings along the Belarusian border this year, many intending to go further west. Germany’s reaction has been to send over 4,600 people back to Poland, and the latter country is not convinced that the former has been following proper procedures in that endeavour. Adding to the tensions have been the issue of reparations to Poland for World War II, something that a majority of Poles are in favour of. Like bitter divorcées, Scholz and Tusk won’t even be in the same room together; both snubbed an award ceremony this week that would have honoured Tusk, who brushed it off, making clear that adhering to proper policy is more important than accolades.

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Cornered

While much of the EU lambasts Germany for going too far by introducing its border controls, within the country only the Greens object – to the CDU, the law doesn’t go far enough, writes Swedish outlet *Dagens Nyheter.* “I grew up in a Germany where the CDU stood for its values,” fired Greens’ Katharina Dröge in the Bundestag. The CDU asserts that there are too many migrants that have “not integrated” and wants assurance that people could be turned away at the border – putting Chancellor Scholz between a rock and a hard place as he scrambles to maintain his party’s power against the CDU and a surging AfD in Saxony and Thuringia. While anti-immigrant fear mongering is the AfD’s bread and butter, it’s now spread to the mainstream - Germany has received the most refugees and the most asylum applications in the EU, and the CDU is seizing on that fact. Is this all just electoral strategy and populism, ahead of next week’s elections in Brandenburg and next year’s federal elections? All eyes are on Scholz as he succumbs to the oppositions’ demands.

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