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The problem with Germany's border controls

This is not just about political expediency: it is about Europe's identity. Germany's border controls are a symptom of a much larger issue

Germany's decision to reinstate border controls without consulting its neighbours is a dangerous step backwards for the European Union. It undermines the essence of European unity at a time when it is most needed. As asylum-seekers continue to arrive, Europe is fracturing under the pressure.

The real solution is not unilateral action or further disunity but fast-tracking implementation of the EU's Pact on Migration and Asylum. The pact, agreed in principle but delayed until 2026 – mainly because of political disagreements among member states and resistance from countries unwilling to share responsibility for asylum-seekers – is designed to distribute responsibility more fairly, introduce solidarity-based support and streamline the asylum process. Delaying its implementation only worsens the crisis of the movement of people.

The EU has long prided itself on its Schengen Agreement, which allows free internal movement across the borders within its zone. But with Germany's recent border closure, cracks are showing in this foundational principle. Countries are no longer working together. Member states are responding independently to the crisis, often swayed by domestic political pressures rather than any sense of European solidarity.

Germany's decision – likely driven by fears of a far-right surge in upcoming elections – sends a troubling message. If Germany, the EU's largest economy and a political heavyweight, is willing to bypass co-operation, what will stop others from doing the same?

Speeding up what has already been

decided

And this is not just a German problem. Other countries, such as Austria, Cyprus and even Poland, are tightening border controls or discussing deporting asylum-seekers back to war-torn countries such as Syria or Afghanistan. This 'go-it-alone' mentality is spreading and threatens to dismantle the hard-earned unity Europe has built over decades. We are witnessing a dangerous trend where border closures and nationalist policies replace co-operation, with disastrous results.

Under the current Dublin Regulation, southern nations such as Italy and Greece, which often occupy the frontline between Europe and the rest of the world, bear the responsibility for processing asylum-seekers, creating an unsustainable situation. This leads to overburdened systems, overcrowded camps and human suffering — all while other EU nations, such as Germany, experience secondary migration as asylum-seekers move north in search of better opportunities.

Accelerating the EU pact is thus critical, to ensure a more equitable and efficient system. It seeks to distribute responsibility for asylum-seekers more fairly across the EU, relieving the pressure on the frontline Mediterranean countries. Each member state would be required to take in a quota of asylum-seekers or contribute financially to those that do so. This solidarity-based support is essential to ensure no country bears the brunt of the crisis while others simply close their borders.

Border closures are a temporary sticking-plaster, which will only deepen divisions between EU member states and stoke nationalist rhetoric across the continent.

Moreover, the pact introduces mechanisms to streamline the asylum process, making it quicker and more balanced. By speeding up processing times for asylum applications and introducing clearer rules for deportations where claims are rejected, it will help prevent the bottlenecks and backlogs that plague the system. Every EU country would share responsibility for processing asylum-seekers, ensuring the burden did not fall disproportionately on certain nations.

The 2026 timeline for implementation is simply too slow. The crisis is happening now and EU leaders must act swiftly. Bringing forward the pact would not only provide immediate relief to overburdened border nations but also prevent the disintegration of European unity we are seeing in real time. Border closures are a temporary sticking-plaster, which will only deepen divisions between EU member states and stoke nationalist rhetoric across the continent.

There is also a moral imperative. The EU prides itself on being a bastion of human rights and democratic values. But by allowing the current asylum system to continue in its broken state, it risks betraying those values. The far right, which paints undifferentiated 'migrants' as threats to European security and culture, is gaining traction precisely because centrist and progressive leaders have failed to present a clear, united solution. Implementing the pact immediately would send a strong signal that Europe can protect its borders while upholding its commitment to human rights.

This crisis is not going to disappear but, with co-ordinated action, it can be managed in a way that honours the principles on which the EU was built.

This is not just about political expediency: it is about Europe's identity. Does it want to be a continent which closes its doors to the most vulnerable, rather than living up to its ideals of compassion, solidarity and co-operation? Germany's border controls are a symptom of a much larger problem — the absence of a unified, comprehensive policy on the movement of people.

But it is not too late to change course. The EU should fast-track the pact now, distribute responsibility more fairly, support frontline countries through a system of solidarity-based contributions and streamline the asylum process.

This crisis is not going to disappear but, with co-ordinated action, it can be managed in a way that honours the principles on which the EU was built. Failure to do so will only embolden those who seek to divide Europe and undermine everything so many have worked so hard to build.

The time for temporary, reactive measures is over. The time for a united, fair and compassionate solution is now — protecting the integrity of the European Union and the dignity of those seeking refuge within its borders.

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