The future of the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit is proving to be a complex political problem. As negotiators aim to avoid a new "hard border" between the two jurisdictions, their efforts will inevitably be shaped by a wider trend that has seen a tightening of border security around and within the European Union itself.

One option on the table during talks between British and Irish civil servants is to [strengthen immigration controls](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/09/britain-to-push-post-brexit-uk-immigration-controls-back-to-irish-border) at entry points to the island of Ireland. This idea has been met with some consternation among Irish political and public commentators, many of whom object to the very principle of Ireland acting as a conduit for the UK's border policy.

The proposed immigration controls at Irish entry points would centre upon the ability to distinguish between British and Irish citizens, other EU citizens and those from outside the European Economic Area. Such measures would seek to protect the special status of British and Irish citizens in these islands, while avoiding the imposition of constraints on the movement of people across the Irish border. But they immediately pose a potential sticking point for the EU, which would baulk at the idea of Ireland, an EU member-state, positively discriminating in favour of British citizens over other EU citizens.

## An era of information sharing

Border controls already vary among the members of the [Common Travel Area](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-travel-area-cta/common-travel-area-cta) -- Ireland, the UK and the Crown Dependencies such as the Isle of Man -- and across different types of borders be they land, sea, or air. Since the late 1990s, immigration officers in Irish ports have had the capacity to examine the identity documents of travellers from elsewhere in the Common Travel Area. This takes the form of fixed controls at air and sea ports and targeted controls along the Irish border. It is a tactic that means passengers are more conscious that they are being scrutinised, although their freedom of movement is not restricted.

In the mid-2000s, Ireland temporarily became a country [of net immigration](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ireland-rapid-immigration-recession). The British government responded to this with a proposal to introduce checks between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in order to block a potential "backdoor for migrants" into the UK via the Irish part of the Common Travel Area. This proposal was [defeated in 2009 by the House of Lords](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/parliament/house-of-lords/defeats\_tabs/2008-09/2009-defeat-5.pdf) partly in a pique of unionist concern at the imposition of any border controls between two parts of the UK, as had been the case during and after World War II.

In the wake of this, by means of compromise, both governments agreed in 2011 on [joint standards for entry](https://immigrationmatters.co.uk/uk-ireland-common-travel-area-loophole-crackdown-announced-by-uk-border-agency.html) and further exchange of information on individual travellers. The price for mutual recognition across the Common Travel Area of visas for visitors from certain countries, such as India, has been increased scrutiny before they can enter the country. There has also been greater use of electronic border systems, including biometric sensors, when passengers arrive and depart. These arrangements mean that there is already far more monitoring of people's travel (particularly air travel) between Britain and the island of Ireland than there is across the Irish border.

## EU border controls tighten

In the meantime, greater scrutiny of passengers as they traverse state boundaries has become standard across Europe. The EU Commission has been taking steps recently to enhance monitoring of its internal and external borders. The assumption it shares here with the British government is that there is an integral connection between inward migration and internal insecurity. The response of both the EU and UK to this perceived threat is to enhance centralised powers of surveillance and increase restrictions on the immigration and internal movement of [non-EU citizens](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control/index\_en.htm).

<image id="143273" align="centre" source="Vassil Donev/EPA" caption="Guards from the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency monitor the border between Bulgaria and Turkey." />

Further measures for the "Security Union" confirmed by European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker in his [State of the Union speech](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016\_en ) in September 2016 include the speedy adoption and implementation of an [EU Entry-Exit System](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/fact-sheets/docs/factsheet\_-\_entryexit\_system\_en.pdf) to collect more data on travellers. The [European Border and Coast Guard Agency](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/09/14-european-border-coast-guard/) (a strengthened version of the existing Frontex agency) is a core component of this border securitisation and came into being in early October 2016 with a reserve pool of 1,500 border guards and advanced technical support.

These developments not only affect external borders but allow the European Council to approve the imposition of temporary border controls between neighbouring member states in the [interest of EU-wide security](http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/European-Border-and-Coast-Guard-boosts-internal-security). This may happen if one state, facing what is deemed to be "severe migratory pressure", fails to "co-operate adequately" with this new agency. These measures have been processed through the European Parliament and EU Council of Ministers at unprecedented speed.

## Fortress Europe leaves no place for outsiders

During a speech at the LSE in September, the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, [claimed](http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/pdf/2016-ST/20160923-Martin-Schultz-Transcript.pdf) that he would not countenance a Europe in which “lorries and hedge funds are free to cross borders but citizens are not”. In so doing, he was not merely advocating the inseparability of the [four freedoms](http://www.europeanpolicy.org/en/european-policies/single-market.html) -- of goods, capital, services and people -- within the EU but also reiterating the hierarchical distinction between EU citizens and immigrants. With such policies, the EU is coming to resemble a new citadel, increasingly fortified against the movement of people from beyond its walls.

Since partition of Ireland in 1921, enforcement policies along the Irish border have run the gambit from "extreme", to hard, to soft. There is one sure lesson from the "borders of the past" in Ireland, of the type that the British prime minister [Theresa May has said she wishes to avoid returning to]( http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/kenny-and-may-agree-no-return-to-hard-border-after-brexit-1.2734884), that the UK and EU must heed. Increasing military and security presence along state borders worsens the patterns of social and economic disintegration in border regions, deepens divisions and mistrust on both sides, and leaves wounds that are still exposed long after the checkpoints have been [dismantled.](http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/Peace\_Network\_Meetings\_and\_Events/PN\_\_The\_Emerald\_Curtain\_\_100205\_The\_Social\_Impact\_of\_the\_Irish\_Border.sflb.ashx)

…

The future of the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit is proving to be a complex political problem. As leaders put together proposals aiming to avoid a new "hard border" between the two countries, their efforts will inevitably be shaped by a wider trend that has seen a tightening of border security around and within the European Union.

One option on the table during talks between British and Irish civil servants is the [strengthening of immigration controls](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/09/britain-to-push-post-brexit-uk-immigration-controls-back-to-irish-border) at entry points to the island of Ireland. This idea has been met with some consternation among Irish political and public commentators, many of whom object to the very principle of Ireland acting as a conduit for the UK's border policy.

The proposed immigration controls at Irish entry points would centre upon the ability to distinguish between British and Irish citizens, other EU citizens and those from outside the European Economic Area. Such measures would seek to protect the special status of British and Irish citizens in these islands, while avoiding the imposition of constraints on the movement of people across the Irish border. But they immediately pose a potential sticking point for the EU, which would baulk at the idea of Ireland, as an EU member-state, positively discriminating in favour of British citizens over EU citizens.

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In the wake of this, by means of compromise, both governments agreed in 2011 on [joint standards for entry](https://immigrationmatters.co.uk/uk-ireland-common-travel-area-loophole-crackdown-announced-by-uk-border-agency.html) and further exchange of information on individual travellers. The price for mutual recognition across the Common Travel Area of visas for visitors from certain countries, such as India, has been an increased scrutiny of travellers before they enter the country and greater use of electronic border systems, including biometric sensors, when they arrive and depart. These arrangements have meant that there is currently far more monitoring of people's travel between Britain and the island of Ireland than there is across the Irish border.

## EU border controls tighten

An increase in the scrutiny of passengers as they traverse state boundaries has become standard across Europe. Indeed, the EU Commission has been taking steps recently to clamp down on entry to its territory and to enhance monitoring of its internal and external borders. The assumption it shares here with the British government is that there is an integral connection between inward migration and internal insecurity. The response of both to this perceived threat is to enhance centralised powers of surveillance and increase restrictions on the immigration and internal movement of [non-EU citizens](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control/index\_en.htm).

Further measures for the "Security Union" confirmed by European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker in his [State of the Union speech](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016\_en ) in September 2016 include speedy adoption and implementation of an [EU Entry-Exit System](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/fact-sheets/docs/factsheet\_-\_entryexit\_system\_en.pdf) that will collect more data on travellers. The operational delivery of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (as a strengthened version of Frontex), with a reserve pool of 1500 border guards, was also accelerated and came into being in early October 2016.

The proposals do not only affect external borders, but allow for the European Council to approve the imposition of temporary border controls between neighbouring member-states in the [interest of EU-wide security](http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/European-Border-and-Coast-Guard-boosts-internal-security) if one state, facing severe migratory pressure, fails to 'co-operate adequately' with this new Agency. These measures have been processed through the European Parliament and EU Council of Ministers at unprecedented speed.

## Fortress Europe leaves no place for outsiders

During a speech at the LSE in September, the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, [claimed](http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/pdf/2016-ST/20160923-Martin-Schultz-Transcript.pdf) that he would not countenance a Europe in which “lorries and hedge funds are free to cross borders but citizens are not”. In so doing, he was not merely advocating the inseparability of the [four freedoms](http://www.europeanpolicy.org/en/european-policies/single-market.html) -- of goods, capital, services and people -- within the EU but also reiterating the hierarchical distinction between EU citizens and immigrants. In such policies, the EU is coming to resemble a new citadel, increasingly fortified against the movement of people from beyond its walls.

Since partition of Ireland in 1921, enforcement policies along the Irish border have run the gambit from "extreme", to hard, to soft. There is one sure lesson to be taken from the "borders of the past" in Ireland of the type that the British prime minister [Theresa May has said she wishes to avoid]( http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/kenny-and-may-agree-no-return-to-hard-border-after-brexit-1.2734884): increasing military and security presence along state borders worsens the patterns of social disintegration in border regions, deepens divisions and mistrust on both sides, and leaves wounds that are still exposed long after the checkpoints have been [dismantled.](http://www.seupb.eu/Libraries/Peace\_Network\_Meetings\_and\_Events/PN\_\_The\_Emerald\_Curtain\_\_100205\_The\_Social\_Impact\_of\_the\_Irish\_Border.sflb.ashx) Nevertheless, as mounting xenophobia propels the west towards strengthening borders and enforcing hierarchies of people, Ireland is once again (over three hundred years after the [Battle of the Boyne](http://www.battleoftheboyne.ie/TheBattleBeyond/)) at risk of being the site of a fraught battle between British and European power-holders…..

The future of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit will be inevitably shaped by the trend of hardening state borders around the EU and within the Schengen Zone.

The announcement on 10 October that British and Irish civil servants are exploring the option of strengthening immigration controls at entry points to the island of Ireland was met with some consternation among Irish political and public commentators – many of whom objected to the very principle of Ireland acting as a conduit for the UK's border policy. That said, an increase in the scrutiny of passengers as they cross state boundaries is a standard move in current trends of European border management.

The proposed immigration controls at Irish entry points would centre upon the ability to distinguish between British and Irish citizens, other EU and non-EEA citizens. This would seek to protect the special status of British and Irish citizens in these islands, while avoiding the imposition of constraints on the movement of people across the Irish border. It nonetheless immediately poses a potential sticking point for the EU, which will baulk at the idea of an EU member-state positively discriminating in favour of non-EU (in this case, British) citizens.

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Border controls already vary among the members of the Common Travel Area (Ireland, the UK and the Crown Dependencies) and across different types of borders (land, sea, and air). Since the late 1990s, immigration officers in Irish ports have had the capacity to examine the identity documents of travellers from elsewhere in the Common Travel Area. This takes the form of fixed controls at air and sea ports and targeted controls along the Irish border. It is a policy that may lead to passengers being more conscious that they are being scrutinised, without impinging on the free movement itself.

For its part, the British government responded to the (as it turned out) temporary status of the Republic of Ireland as a country of net-immigration in the early to mid-2000s with a proposal in 2009 to introduce checks between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. This was meant to block the potential "backdoor for migrants" – despite lack of evidence that Belfast or Larne or Derry City airport have ever posed such a risk. This proposal was [defeated at the time by the House of Lords] (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/research/parliament/house-of-lords/defeats_tabs/2008-09/2009-defeat-5.pdf>) partly in a pique of unionist concern at the reimposition of any such border between Ulster and Britain. The imposition of such controls happened during and after World War II and so is still within living memory of some.

In the wake of this, both governments agreed in 2011 on [joint standards for entry] (https://immigrationmatters.co.uk/uk-ireland-common-travel-area-loophole-crackdown-announced-by-uk-border-agency.html) and further exchange of information, including biometric data, as part of visa issuing process. The price for mutual recognition of visas for travel for visitors from certain countries (such as India) across the Common Travel Area has been increased use of electronic border systems and monitoring of travellers. Biometric devices and electronic sensors mean that monitoring of the movement of people is more advanced than the technology to monitor the passage of goods.

## EU border controls tighten

At the same time, the EU Commission has been taking steps to clamp down on entry to its territory and to enhance monitoring of its external borders. The assumption it *shares* with the British government in this move is that there is an integral connection between threats to internal security and inward migration. The response of both to this perceived threat is to enhance centralised powers of surveillance and increase restrictions on the inward migration and internal movement around the EU of citizens from outside the European Economic Area.

New measures for the "Security Union" confirmed by European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker in his [State of the Union speech](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016\_en ) in September 2016 included speedy adoption and implementation of an EU Entry-Exit System that will collect data on travellers. The operational delivery of the European Border and Coast Guard as an arm of Frontex (with a reserve pool of 1,500 border guards), will also be accelerated. Such measures trump national sovereignty in the [interest of EU-wide security](http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/European-Border-and-Coast-Guard-boosts-internal-security).

These measures are being rushed through the European Parliament and EU Council of Ministers at unprecedented speed, propelled by the narrative of "immigrant as security threat" – a narrative very familiar to the UK electorate.

## Fortress Europe leaves no place for outsiders

When European Parliament President Schulz [claimed](http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/pdf/2016-ST/20160923-Martin-Schultz-Transcript.pdf), in his speech at the LSE in September that he would not countenance a Europe in which “lorries and hedge funds are free to cross borders but citizens are not”, he was not merely advocating the inseparability of the four freedoms but reiterating the hierarchical distinction between EU citizens and immigrants. The EU as security union is a citadel, increasingly fortified against the movement of people from beyond its walls.

Back in the Common Travel Area, it appears that the measures to be considered by the British and Irish governments are consciously different from the situation in Calais, where (for the time being) British police guard the French border as [part of the Le Touquet agreement](https://theconversation.com/what-next-for-british-border-controls-in-calais-64769). This comes with high fences electrified or topped with razor wire and monitored by CCTV, roving security patrols with dogs and carbon dioxide detectors.

Since partition of Ireland in 1921, enforcement policies along the Irish border have run the gambit from "extreme" to hard, to soft. There is one sure lesson to be taken from the "borders of the past" in Ireland that [Theresa May has said she wishes to avoid]( http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/kenny-and-may-agree-no-return-to-hard-border-after-brexit-1.2734884): the securitisation and militarisation of national borders worsen the patterns of local social and political disintegration in border regions, deepen divisions and mistrust on both sides, and leave wounds that are still exposed long after the checkpoints have been dismantled. As the logic of xenophobia motivates a new propulsion towards strengthening external borders, Ireland is once again at risk of being the site of fraught contestation between British and European power politics.

…..

The future of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland after Brexit will be inevitably shaped by the trend of hardening state borders around the EU and within the Schengen Zone (of which 22 EU states are members).

The announcement on 10 October that British and Irish civil servants are exploring the option of strengthening immigration controls at entry points to the island of Ireland was met with some consternation among Irish political and public commentators – many of whom objected to the very principle of Ireland acting as a conduit for the UK's border policy. That said, an increase in the scrutiny of passengers as they cross state boundaries is a standard move in current trends of European border management.

The proposed immigration controls at Irish entry points would centre upon the ability to distinguish between British and Irish citizens, other EU and non-EEA (European Economic Area) citizens. This would seek to protect the special status of British and Irish citizens in these islands, while avoiding the imposition of constraints on the movement of people across the Irish border. It nonetheless immediately poses a potential sticking point for the EU, which at the very least will baulk at the idea of an EU member-state (in this case, Ireland) positively discriminating in favour of non-EU (in this case, British) citizens over EU citizens.

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Border controls already vary among the members of the Common Travel Area (Ireland, the UK and the Crown Dependencies) and across different types of borders (land, sea, and air). Since the late 1990s, immigration officers in Irish ports have had the capacity to examine the identity documents of travellers from elsewhere in the Common Travel Area. This takes the form of fixed controls at air and sea ports and targeted controls along the Irish border. It is a tactic that means passengers are more conscious that they are being scrutinised, without in actual fact impinging on their freedom of movement.

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## EU border controls tighten

At the same time, the EU Commission has been taking steps to clamp down on entry to its territory and to enhance monitoring of its external borders. The assumption it shares with the British government in this move is that there is an integral connection between threats to internal security and inward migration. The response of both to this perceived threat is to enhance centralised powers of surveillance and increase restrictions on the inward migration and internal movement around the Schengen area of citizens from non-member countries.

New measures for the "Security Union" confirmed by European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker in his [State of the Union speech](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/state-union-2016\_en ) in September 2016 included speedy adoption and implementation of an EU Entry-Exit System that will collect data on travellers. The operational delivery of the European Border and Coast Guard as an arm of Frontex (with a reserve pool of 1,500 border guards), will also be accelerated. The proposals do not only affect external borders, but allow for European measures of border management to trump national sovereignty in the [interest of EU-wide security](http://www.eppgroup.eu/press-release/European-Border-and-Coast-Guard-boosts-internal-security):

“if an EU country refuses to co-operate with the new Agency to an extent that this puts the proper functioning of the Schengen zone into jeopardy, there will be a possibility for the other EU countries to reintroduce temporary border controls as a last resort”.

These measures are being rushed through the European Parliament and EU Council of Ministers at unprecedented speed, propelled by the narrative of "immigrant as security threat" – a narrative very familiar to the UK electorate.

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When European Parliament President Schulz [claimed](http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/pdf/2016-ST/20160923-Martin-Schultz-Transcript.pdf), in his speech at the LSE in September that he would not countenance a Europe in which “lorries and hedge funds are free to cross borders but citizens are not”, he was not merely advocating the inseparability of the four freedoms but reiterating the hierarchical distinction between EU citizens and immigrants. The EU as security union is a citadel, increasingly fortified against the movement of people from beyond its walls.

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