

Another headache for the EU

Concerns about the EU's cherished principle of free movement of people is not only confined to the UK. Non-EU Switzerland voted to restrict migration from the EU in a referendum in 2014.

The EU was not happy with the result and has threatened to rescind the bilateral treaties which govern its relationship with Switzerland. but the Swiss have not backed down. The deadline for an agreement is February next year. The treaties, which cover everything from agriculture to civil aviation and the free movement of people, contain a "guillotine" clause that would nullify all if one is struck down.

Talks are continuing to avoid this impasse. EU diplomats reacted positively to a proposal to give Swiss job seekers an advantage over foreigners, but many obstacles still stand in the way of an agreement.

Switzerland has less flexibility in restricting migration than the non-EU members of the EEA. Liechtenstein has exercised its freedom to restrict migration. Switzerland will find it a lot harder to obtain concessions from the EU, as free movement of people is a cornerstone of the EU-Switzerland deal, as Swissinfo explains.

With the 27 other EU member states meeting for something of a crisis meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, the scale of the EU's problems is being laid bare. Even within the EU, the Dutch are calling for an "emergency brake" on immigration. The former Soviet bloc countries are not so keen. Another idea being floated around is a distinction between free movement of workers and free movement of people, but some senior figures within the EU are none too happy about this idea. Come what may, however, it is apparent that both within and without the EU, the thorny issue of immigration is not going to vanish from

the headlines any time soon.