

Schengen's flaws are challenging the EU project as never before

The EU has traditionally excelled at using crises for its own ends – in other words, to further integration. The flawed Euro project, which set interest rates for the benefit of Germany but not the Mediterranean nations, is a classic example. The tragic recessions in Greece, Spain and elsewhere have provided the impetus for another treaty designed to surrender fiscal sovereignty of the Eurozone member states and thus move an EU inner core closer to becoming a federal superstate. Even though treaty plans currently seem to be dormant, they are still on the longer-term agenda.

The flood of refugees into Europe, however, is proving challenging, not only in and of itself but also as far as turning it into a beneficial crisis is concerned. Member states are unilaterally reimposing border controls – in other words, pushing back the integration process. There is provision under the Schengen agreement for a temporal reimposition of borders in the event of an emergency, so putting back border controls isn't necessarily breaking the rules, but the migrant crisis has struck deeper into the heart of the European project than anything else for many years.

You can now find articles discussing the possibility of ending the Schengen agreement altogether. The writer of the article in the link, like others, says that the implications of such a move for the whole EU project would be immense. He does go on to say, however, that it probably won't happen

For such optimists, a report by Frontex, the European Union's border agency, will not make happy reading. Frontex officials

warned a that 'staggering' number of European citizens had become jihadists and were taking advantage of lax border controls. The organisation also stated that it had no idea how many illegal immigrants had entered the EU.

So far, concerns over these issues – or indeed, the aftermath of the Brussels bombings – have not shifted public opinion in the UK towards withdrawal. While most of those for whom migration is an issue are firmly on-side already, one might have expected the desire to distance ourselves from terrorists on the Continent to have helped some wavering voters make their minds up.

What may help provide a more favourable backdrop for the debate is the growing disillusion with the whole European project elsewhere. It's not just open borders and immigration. Today the Dutch are holding a referendum on a proposed pact between the EU and Ukraine, which is viewed by both sides as a preliminary move towards Ukrainian membership. Expansion fatigue has been a factor in many older EU countries for many years, but without further expansion on the horizon to encourage the masses that the EU is marching ever forward, the threat of stagnation – and indeed of implosion – of the EU increases. The referendum is non-binding, but a "no" vote will send another powerful signal to Brussels that disillusion with *le grand projet* is not confined to the UK.

The debate in this country appears to have moved on from the days when we were told that a UK withdrawal could see the whole EU project undermined. This is a shame as it can be so easily countered. The EU is already showing signs of fracture and UK withdrawal could prove the best way to achieve a peaceful dismemberment, rather than the disorderly collapses that has brought to an end many multinational entities from the Roman Empire through to the Soviet Union.

In other words, if the UK votes to withdraw from the EU, to quote William Pitt, "England has saved herself by her

exertions and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example”