

## The EU'S borders

The main issue tackled at Salzburg is of great interest and concern. How many migrants should the EU admit? What controls should it place at its external border to control numbers arriving? How many of those borders should be hard physical borders with walls and fences, watch towers and plenty of staff? The EU has helped fund just such a tough border for Turkey with the states to the south, and some states like Austria and Hungary have also built their own walls and fences with razor wire.

The EU has a European Border and Coastguard service or Frontex, with a headquarters in Warsaw. The informal Council discussed whether this should be substantially beefed up with 10,000 new recruits to help member states handle the big issues of entry into the EU. To date Frontex has always claimed member states have the responsibility for policing their own borders, to an approved set of common rules. Frontex has access to specialist personnel and equipment to come and assist where there are particular problems or pressures. Recruiting many more staff would be a precondition for Frontex becoming a much more active participant in border security. Frontex offers ships, trained personnel and surveillance equipment.

Member states are divided on this issue. There is a strong wish to see tougher common EU border security, but also in some cases a reluctance to surrender power to police the border to an EU authority. Some states like Hungary and Austria have pushed their interpretation of EU policy a long way in the direction of hard borders and tough controls. The EU is now responding. It has a good relationship with Egypt to deter migrants from that country. It is now collaborating with the Libyan coastguard so more people rescued at sea who started out from Libya are returned to Libya. It is looking to enter agreements with more North African states, just as it has done with Turkey. In return for substantial sums of money, Turkey has agreed to provide a home for Syrian refugees and not to send them on to the EU.

Mr Salvini in Italy is pressing hard for a much tougher EU stance on migration. He has been refusing boats the right to land, and has recently organised the removal of a Panamanian flag from a charity boat that brings migrants from the sea to the shores of Italy, to remove the boat's right of passage. The EU do not like his approach, but so far have been unable to stop it.