

# Editorial

## Down with Border Controls (?)

Once again the relationship between the Community and the United Kingdom has been in the forefront of political life. With the end of Mrs Thatcher's premiership the long-standing invitation to The Queen to address the European Parliament could be accepted. Yet this overdue occasion was marred by controversy over misleading summaries of the contents of her Speech. A few days later the Iron Lady demonstrated that whilst the cricket bat had replaced the handbag, she was unrepentant in her approach to dynamic integration within the Community. Whilst it is now clear that the United Kingdom will ratify the Treaty on European Union, this is in part due to the fact that a Tory rebellion by the Thatcherite wing will have no effect as the Labour Party will not oppose ratification (although an amendment on the social aspects will be fought out).

All too many things seem to play into the hands of the United Kingdom government at the moment in its campaign to maintain border

controls: Spain continues to block the Convention on External Frontiers (on account of Gibraltar); the mass migrations emphasise the economic and political consequences of population drift in search of better and peaceful economic and social conditions, and political extremists in various countries seek to exploit racist feelings. All this at the time when the Commission is attempting to ensure that border controls – always incompatible with the concept of a single market – disappear for ever within the Community on 1 January 1993.

It would be a pity if the United Kingdom were to be the exception to freedom of travel without formalities within the Community. Indeed, the United Kingdom already has a common travel area with Ireland. The United Kingdom government pleads the necessity to distinguish between Community and non-Community citizens travelling within the Community, arguing that the absence of registration and identity obligations in the United Kingdom means that border controls are essential to guarantee that only those who may lawfully be in the United Kingdom enter it. Whilst the strength of these concerns can readily be

appreciated, the mutual confidence on which the Community is based should form the basis for accepting reliance on the immigration controls of other Member States at their external frontiers. Yet all is not so simple; asylum policy and effective external Community border checks vary widely from Member State to Member State. If the Commission is to make its desirable aim stick, the other Member States will have to be seen to tighten their policies and practices. That itself will cause political difficulties elsewhere (although, faced with the consequences of mass economic migration those difficulties may be overcome). For its part, it appears that the United Kingdom is considering introducing identity cards; these bring problems of political acceptability. At all costs an increase in racism and xenophobia will have to be avoided, but it is to be hoped that the opening up of Community frontiers will not simply lead to yet more bureaucracy and police power at the local level.

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