GERMAN POLICE NAB CROOKS WITH TIGHTER ANTI-TERROR CHECKS

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A fugitive criminal, a parent dodging child support, a hit and run driver or a person wanted for a drug offense - they are in for a surprise these days if they try to board a commercial flight from Germany to, say, Ireland, because they will most certainly be stopped and nabbed by German federal police.

Under new EU border regulations effective since early April 2017, identity checks are mandatory for everyone leaving and entering the EU's Schengen passport-free travel zone. Previously, checks of travelers to non-Schengen destinations were much less rigorous. The Schengen zone includes 22 EU states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Ireland and Britain are not part of the zone.

Now border control officers can crosscheck passengers' documents against EU-wide security databases, like the Schengen Information System (SIS), Interpol and registers of wanted persons.

Response to increase of terrorist threats

In the first six months of this year alone, federal police at Cologne-Bonn Airport caught 206 people with outstanding arrest warrants. This was a 26 percent increase over last year, according to Martin Pauly, press spokesman for the airport's federal police. Just last week, the police caught three wanted men in a single night, two of whom paid their fines on the spot and were allowed to continue their trips. The third failed to pay and was sent to jail.

The police expect the figures will remain high for some time because the tougher passport controls have only been in place for a few months, he told DW.

Frankfurt Airport, Germany's busiest by far, does not yet have robust figures.

However, catching criminals on the run has been a side-effect of the tougher laws. The heightened security was put in place as a response to a series of terror attacks in Paris and Brussels that involved EU nationals drawn by the ideology of the so-called "Islamic State" (IS) terrorist group.

The German federal police's scrutiny of passports held by every single person headed to and from certain destinations is a means to gather information, Pauly says. He explained that it enables the police to keep a close eye on the travel movements of suspected IS supporters who might pose a real threat.

The 280 federal police officers stationed at Cologne-Bonn Airport are also keen to keep track of

suspected IS supporters' travel companions, he says.

Kaynak/Source: