
MACRON EYES FRANCE-UK BORDER AGREEMENT

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French president Emmanuel Macron is set to discuss reforming a bilateral border agreement with UK prime minister Theresa May on Thursday (18 January) amid pressure to prevent migrants from settling around the port city of Calais.

Macron has threatened to overhaul the agreement with demands that may include more British funding as well as requests to take in more refugees and unaccompanied minors as part of a larger effort to prevent migrant camps from mushrooming in Calais.

In an apparent bid to sweeten the diplomatic pill, Macron is also due to announce that France will send the famous Bayeux Tapestry on loan to the UK. The 11th century artwork depicts the Norman invasion of Britain, and is housed in a special museum in Bayeux, Normandy.

Similar demands to Macron's have been made by Calais' right-wing mayor Natacha Bouchart, who told this website in 2016, that France should "take advantage of UK's EU exit vote" to scrap the agreement and have Britain shoulder expenses.

French authorities at the time had dismantled the so-called Jungle where thousands of people were living in ad-hoc settlements near the city of Calais.

Up to 600 people are now thought to be in Calais in a desperate bid to reach the UK with France deploying 1,130 police officers to patrol the area. Many of the people are said to be from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

Some are sleeping rough, others are housed by Calais residents, with another 270 in temporary shelters to protect them from the cold. Three recently died in their attempt to reach the UK.

On official visit in Calais on Tuesday (16 January), Macron said he would not allow another settlement to emerge as he outlined French migration plans to increase accommodation, shorten asylum procedures, create better integration opportunities, and finance the distribution of food to migrants. Food distribution is currently done by NGOs.

"There will be no reconstruction of 'the Jungle' or tolerance of illegal settlements in or around Calais," he said.

He described Calais as a dead-end for anyone without proper paper work hoping to cross the English Channel. He also defended police against accusations of violence recently described in an NGO report as "excessive and life-threatening".

Macron was accompanied by his interior minister Gerard Collomb, who last week told the Le Parisien newspaper that Britain needs to assume more costs and receive more people.

But the UK appears to resist the idea. A UK government spokesperson was cited by the BBC as saying that Britain had already "taken significant number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the area around and in Calais".

Collomb's ministry will be overseeing a new interministerial delegation on refugee integration set for launch next week. He is also expected to outline an immigration law in February.

Kaynak/Source: