



Home Affairs Committee

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From the Committee Chair

By email only

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
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16 June 2022

Dear Home Secretary,

Home Affairs Committee visit to the Port of Dover

I am writing to raise concerns about the challenges of the new EU Entry-Exit System for the Port of Dover which the Committee heard about following its visit on Tuesday 7 June.

The Committee met with senior Port of Dover officials and visited all parts of the Port for a physical oversight of how the Port operates within its confined geographical location. Our visit took place on a comparatively quiet mid-week day but queues of lorries were visible and the flow was steady and continuous with less than a minute spent by each vehicle at each point on entry to the port area.

As you will be aware, Dover is a port of strategic national significance for travellers, freight and UK trade, seeing at its peak 5,000 plus lorry movements daily and up to 120 ferry crossings, with a departure every 25 minutes - representing around £3 billion in trade each week.

We were concerned to hear from the Port that it believes the new EU Entry-Exit System will substantially reduce the speed of flow through the border control posts, potentially raising the time spent per vehicle from 30-45 seconds to around 8-10 minutes, which would result in substantial queues and potentially reduce capacity and impact UK trade. Safety could also be compromised if drivers are required to leave their vehicles under the EES rules.

Of further concern are the new passport checking arrangements which require biometric identity details, and a physical check by a border post official at present, as required in EU legislation. While these checks are familiar at airports, the logistical challenges are far greater at sea terminals like Dover where space is at a premium and where travellers arrive in groups and/or in vehicles which they cannot safely leave. The Committee was also told that 70% of tourists passing through the port are UK citizens and will therefore require the further checks, as well as greater

immigration and customs controls. In addition, these new checking arrangements will, among UK ports, uniquely affect Dover and the nearby Channel Tunnels, since they have juxtaposed border controls and therefore may require changes to existing national border infrastructure. We are concerned that all of these factors risk causing severe delays to passenger and vehicle flow at the Port.

Significantly the Committee heard that Port officials had engaged proactively with the French authorities at an operational level about the practical challenges with the EES specific to Dover. However, they have been unable to meet with French officials who have 'strategic' responsibility which they argue is urgently required to make progress. The Port acknowledged the new EES is a Schengen requirement but emphasised that as a juxtaposed control point the practical challenges of the EES are a shared problem.

I would be grateful for a response to the following questions:

1) In January 2022 you wrote to Baroness Hamwee, Chair of the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee, that while the implementation of the system was the responsibility of the French authorities your Department was engaging with stakeholders, France and the EU 'to create an EES solution that is operable, in particular at the juxtaposed border control locations',¹ On Tuesday 7 June, the Committee heard from the Port that little progress had been made to find a solution to the practical problems associated with conducting Entry-Exit System checks.

- Can you provide the Committee with an update on your Department's engagement with the EU and French authorities to create an EES solution to reflect the unique circumstances at the Port of Dover?
- When did you last meet with your EU and French counterparts, and what was agreed?
- Has your Department considered whether exemptions could be implemented for the Port of Dover (and other UK main border crossings); specifically, that no border official be required to physically oversee the fingerprinting process of the EES? If not, is this something your Department might consider in its engagement with the EU and its French counterparts?

2) It is the Committee's understanding that biometric identity details could be gathered in advance of arrival within the Port's geographically confined location, thus avoiding the need to queue at Dover and cause tailbacks through the town and on to the feeder roads.

- Can you confirm whether your Department has proposed this solution to its EU and French counterparts, and if so, what was the outcome?

I look forward to receiving your response.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Transport.

Yours sincerely

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8969/documents/152518/default/>

Diana Johnson

Dame Diana Johnson MP

CC: Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP