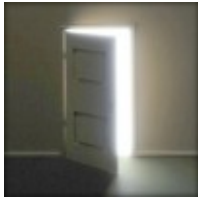


Will the Dutch pardon illegal immigrants? 18/05/2005 00:00



Spain and Italy have granted pardons. So what are the chances of the Netherlands opening the door to newcomers who are already living and working here illegally?

Given the current political climate, I do not see much room for a general pardon for illegalen (illegal immigrants).

As you may know, Queen Beatrix is momentarily celebrating her 25th year as our head of state. An action group has petitioned the Queen to pardon a fairly small group of illegal immigrants who have been in the Netherlands for quite a long time.

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende has been quick on the draw and publicly announced that no pardon will be issued to these illegal immigrants. The Ministry of Justice is working on deporting more than 20,000 asylum seekers whose applications have been turned down by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and the Dutch courts.

Spanish pardon

Spain is a completely different story. In 2000, the conservative government, under José María Aznar, already issued work and residence permits to approximately 230,000 illegal immigrants. Another 239,000 permits were issued in 2001.

Recently, 700,000 illegal immigrants applied for amnesty under a scheme that was implemented by Spain's current left-wing government, led by Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero.

The general opinion is that a majority of these applicants will receive temporary work and residence permits. The permits will be valid for one year and may be extended if and when the applicant can prove that he or she has worked for six months and paid social security contributions and taxes.

France closes the door

The government in France has chosen a completely different approach. A full blown frontal attack on illegal immigration: a EUR 100 million annual budget for deportations, the establishment of a new immigration police force, the implementation of biometric visas for foreigners, and significant changes in French law in order to tackle the problems regarding so-called fake marriages.

Italy legalised more than 600,000 illegal immigrants in 2002.

Dutch get tough

A couple of weeks ago the European Commission proposed a set of new funds to help EU member states to tackle immigration and asylum-related problems. Money from the funds is earmarked for the integration of newcomers within host societies or the repatriating of illegal immigrants.

The proposal, amounting to a total of EUR 8.3 billion, came as part of the new package detailing EU spending for the period 2007 - 2013 and was adopted by the European Commission on 6 April 2005.

EU members all play a different tune regarding illegal immigrants. Italy and Spain seem to follow the soft approach.

France and The Netherlands seem to be amongst the hardliners on illegal immigration. Interesting to see that both these countries also have serious doubts about the European Constitution, and may even vote "non" and "nee" in referendums on the document on 29 May and 1 June respectively.

At the same time the European Commission is splashing out on new funds for newcomers. Isn't there supposed to be one Europe as far as justice and immigration are concerned?

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