

## Opinion



The Öresund Bridge between Sweden and Denmark. Photo: Janus Langhorn/imagebank.sweden.se

## 'Scrap border checks on bridge to Denmark'

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**Sweden's tightened border controls on the Öresund bridge is a blow to growth in one of the country's most vibrant regions, write Stefan Müchler and Per Tryding of the southern Swedish Chamber of Commerce.**

- **Sweden border checks to extend into Denmark** (07 Dec 15)

Four years ago, the Danish People's Party talked Denmark's Liberal Party government into stepping up ID checks at the Swedish and German borders. The reasoning was that criminality was flowing into Denmark across the Öresund Bridge.

German as well as Swedish business industries hit out immediately at the time and their message was clear. Notwithstanding the fact that it would violate the principle of free movement, it would also be a blow to trade and growth.

That time, the checks were short-lived. Denmark got a Social Democratic government which scrapped the plans and honoured the EU's and the Nordics' open borders.

But it is all happening again. Of course the reasons are more urgent this time around. But one important aspect remains the same. Closed borders are used to show off decisive action against a phenomenon that can never be solved by closing oneself off to the world.

The new version of border controls has little chance of working smoothly and is likely to have a negative influence on the Öresund region's growth potential.

The idea is that the public transport companies – just as on flights – will be responsible for checking the ID of anyone buying a ticket or boarding trains crossing the bridge from Denmark to Sweden.

It is easy to see the ulterior motive, namely that these tickets should be acquired on Danish soil.

In that way the government hopes to kick the ball back to the Danish side of the court. If refugees are not allowed on to the trains the idea is that the problem will be handled by Danish authorities. But there is not a lot which suggests that Denmark is going to accept that.

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*Police on a train from Copenhagen to Malmö. Photo: Stig-Åke Jönsson/TT*

Apart from all the important humanitarian and human aspects, there is one other critical parameter. This is not a border like the one between Stockholm and Helsinki, with a number of ferries calling a couple of times a day. The Öresund region is an increasingly integrated region with 3.9 million citizens.

Both sides have invested in commuting – and it has paid off. On the Swedish side alone, the Malmö region's commuting range has grown by 470,000 people since the year 2000 to more than 1.1 million people today. The bridge traffic is linked to Copenhagen's metro and Skåne's entire public transport network. Delays and train cancellations therefore affect the whole commuter region.

Just imagine similar checks on buses and trains between Uppsala and Stockholm with similar domino effects on the whole underground system.

This happens in a situation where Skåne's and Denmark's economies – which are increasingly synchronized – are rising sharply. Seven out of ten Skåne companies believe in growth. Two thirds report difficulties recruiting and more than one in ten say they have refrained from expanding because of staff shortages.

To effectively shrink the region's local labour market in that situation is a major blow to growth.

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The main goal, of course, has to be coordinating the asylum issue within the EU and quickly deal with the union's outer borders. The government probably realizes this.

But while we wait for that, pragmatic negotiations are needed, not just with other parties but with our neighbouring countries. We need to let go of pride and prestige.

Sweden is not going to win against Denmark, the unofficial European champion when it comes to tight asylum rules. Trying to force your own policies on other countries is also unlikely to succeed.

In the long term, it goes without saying that Sweden and the EU should remain open to skilled workers as well as refugees. In fact, the question is rather if our economies will survive without this integration. The Chamber of Commerce will therefore increase its efforts to promote integration in various ways.

In the short term, Malmö in particular is under pressure and the situation is not sustainable. But splitting the largest region in the Nordics in two is not the solution.

**This article was written by Stephan Mühler and Per Tryding, CEO and deputy CEO of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Sweden ([Sydsvenska handelskammaren](#)), and was originally published by [Dagens Industri](#).**

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