

Danish far-right calls for more border control

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COPENHAGEN, August 29, 2011 (AFP) - The far-right Danish People's Party (DPP) kicked off campaigning Monday for elections next month with a call for Denmark to toughen its controversial border control regime and move asylum centres abroad.

The party, which as a key ally of the minority centre-right government pushed Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen's cabinet to reintroduce permanent customs controls on Danish borders despite European Union opposition, insisted that even more customs officers were needed.

"When the (September 15) election is over we will need more customs officers and it will be necessary to increase their powers if we want a permanent border control," DPP justice spokesman Peter Skaarup told reporters.

Denmark deployed 50 new customs officers at its borders with Germany and Sweden on July 5, a move the EU Commission feared was a violation of the 27-nation open-border Schengen Agreement.

The government's agreement to the plan, which it insists complies with Schengen, came as payment for the far-right party's support in pushing through a long term economic package.

The anti-immigration DPP also demanded Monday that Denmark dramatically reduce the number of asylum centres in the country and move them to locations in North Africa, Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and the Middle East instead.

It did not say exactly how many of Denmark's half-dozen asylum centres it would like to see closed.

"In a globalised world, it is important that we protect our welfare state against people coming from outside and enjoying the benefits of our society," Skaarup said.

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The DPP made its demands in the run-up to elections that are widely expected to go to the centre-left opposition, which would basically eliminate the influence the far-right party has wielded for the past decade in its position as government ally.

The Social Democrat-led opposition, which recent polls hand a comfortable lead ahead of Rasmussen's bloc, has said it would roll back the permanent customs control initiative if it comes to power.

The DPP, which in 2007 won 13.8 percent of the vote, appears to be fighting an uphill battle, with the most recent survey showing at the weekend its support dwindling to 12 percent.