

Austria Begins Construction of Fence on Border with Slovenia



Vienna, December 8 (RHC)-- Austria has started initial works for erecting a fence at a crossing point on its southern border used by refugees, a first such barrier in Europe's passport-free travel zone.

Reports on Monday said that operations had begun at Spielfeld municipality in the district of Leibnitz near Austria's border with Slovenia with workers driving metal posts into the ground.

The government of Chancellor Werner Faymann had said last month that it was planning the two-meter-high barrier along a 3.7-kilometer (2.3 mile) stretch either side of the crossing point, in a bid to better manage the inflow of refugees seen in recent months.

Rolls of wire fencing were dumped on the ground to connect the posts erected in the area, witnesses said, while the government announced that more such rolls will be stored in containers at the border ready to be installed in an emergency.

Officials said the work on the border fence, which is also assisted by the Austrian army, will be completed by December 25.

Austria shares a 330-kilometer border with Slovenia, with the crossing point seeing hundreds of thousands entering the country over the past months. Many refugees, who come from Middle East and

Africa, travel through Austria to reach more affluent states like Germany and those in Scandinavia, but Austria itself expects a record 95,000 applications from the asylum seekers.

The border fence is the first between two members of the Schengen, a 1995 treaty which allows free travel between 22 members of the European Union and four other countries.

Some eastern members of the EU which strongly oppose the body's mandatory quotas for the settlement of refugees had earlier erected such fences along their borders. Slovenia last month began erecting razor wire along its frontier with Croatia, a member of the EU but a Schengen non-member.

Imposing restrictions on the movement of refugees in Europe intensified after a series of attacks on November 13 in the French capital Paris which killed 130.

Estimates by the United Nations show the flow of refugees has slowed significantly over the past weeks as poor weather makes it difficult for the refugees to pass the Mediterranean while Turkey, based on a recent agreement with the EU, has stepped up its crackdown on people smugglers.

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