

2019.05.21

12 Deputy M. Tadier of the Minister for Home Affairs regarding the Customs and Immigrations checks undertaken on journeys from St. Malo to Jersey: (OQ.132/2019)

Will the Minister advise whether baggage checks for cannabis, or other illegal drugs, are carried out, as a matter of course, in St. Malo for passengers to Jersey, including foot passengers; and if not, at which point in a standard journey Customs officers undertake such checks?

The Connétable of St. Clement (The Minister for Home Affairs):

The control of passengers, travelling outward from St. Malo, is a matter for the French authorities and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the operational policies and procedures of another jurisdiction. But, I can say this: the Jersey Customs and Excise Service have an excellent relationship with their French colleagues; there have been many successful joint operations, with multiple arrests and drug seizures taking place over many years. Quite often on these situations, drugs are intercepted before they leave France and the arrests and legal processes take place there. As far as Jersey is concerned, the Customs and Immigration Officers are required to conduct immigration control on all passengers arriving from outside the Common Travel Area. The Customs Control, which usually takes place after passengers have passed through immigration, is focused on detecting persons importing prohibited, or restricted, goods.

4.12.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

I understand that checks that are carried out in France are matters for the French authorities. The problem is that when somebody gets through from St. Malo and they end up in Jersey, they are then the responsibility of the Minister and the costs from 2017 for prisoners at La Moye are in the order of £77,000 a year per prisoner. So, my question is: surely it is better to catch more of these offenders before they get to the Island? With regard to the ferry operator from St. Malo, of which there is only one, would it not be better that checks are carried out routinely and automatically on all hand baggage, so that they are scanned, so that the low-hanging fruits of people smuggling into Jersey are picked up on the other side of the border, not with the expectation that they will get into the Island, where we pick up the bill?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

As I say, there is an excellent relationship between Jersey Customs and Immigration and their French counterparts and, as I said in my answer, now there are very often joint operations, where potential smugglers of illegal substances into the Island are intercepted in St. Malo, in France; are arrested in France and are dealt with by the French authorities. If the prison sentence is eventually the appropriate sanction, that is carried out in France, at the French taxpayers' expense. If a perpetrator of a crime is in Jersey, it is a Jersey issue and, therefore, we have to take responsibility for it. I do not think it is reasonable that we can ask the French to take responsibility for crimes committed in Jersey; we have to play our part in that.

4.12.2 Deputy K.F. Morel:

It is understandable that a crime committed in France, prosecuted in France, is not reported in the Island, so, perhaps, we do not know how many potential drug smugglers are caught in St. Malo. Does the Minister keep those statistics to understand how many potential smugglers to Jersey are stopped and apprehended in St. Malo?

[10:45]

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The Deputy has started his question by saying we do not know how many are arrested, or stopped in St. Malo; therefore, it is not possible for me to keep records of something that we do not know about.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I was saying that we do not know in the media, is what I intended to say. I was wondering if, through the official perspective, you liaise and understand from the French authorities how many people they stop and apprehend in St. Malo on their way to Jersey.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

What I can tell the Deputy and I repeat it again: there is an excellent, superb, wonderful relationship between the French Customs authorities and the Jersey Customs authorities and they work together, as I said just now, on joint operations. Where it is appropriate that the potential smuggler is stopped in France, it is dealt with by the French authorities. If it is appropriate, or it is not noticed, or not caught and they are caught by the Jersey authorities, it is the Jersey authorities who take responsibility. But, quite honestly, I cannot give the Deputy numbers of individuals.

4.12.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

Perhaps I should have been more clear; my focus is not so much on the French Customs and Immigration authorities, rather the travel companies themselves and it is a well-known fact that when anyone travels to the Island by plane, all bags are automatically x-rayed, so we know what is in them, but there is no such requirement for boat travel. Would the Minister consider consulting with these ferry companies, to make sure that all baggage is scanned before coming to the Island to ultimately save us costs and expedite the process of detection of illicit substances?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I really do not know if that would help, because my understanding is that aircraft baggage is scanned for security purposes, to make sure that there is no such things as explosives and so on. I do not believe the security operation at Jersey Airport, or any other airport, is specifically looking for illegal drugs. That is my understanding; I could be wrong, but that is certainly my understanding.