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Immigration: Romanian or Bulgarian? You won't like it here

Ministers consider launching negative ad campaign in two countries to persuade potential immigrants to stay away from UK

Please don't come to Britain – it rains and the jobs are scarce and low-paid. Ministers are considering launching a negative advertising campaign in Bulgaria and Romania to persuade potential immigrants to stay away from the UK.

The plan, which would focus on the downsides of British life, is one of a range of potential measures to stem immigration to Britain next year when curbs imposed on both country's citizens living and working in the UK will expire.

A report over the weekend quoted one minister saying that such a negative advert would "correct the impression that the streets here are paved with gold".

There was no word on how any advert might look or whether it would use the strategy of making Britain look as horrible as possible or try to encourage would-be migrants to wake up to the joys of their own countries whether Romania's Carpathian mountains or Bulgaria's Black Sea resorts. With governments around the world spending millions on hiring London-based consultants to undertake "reputation laundering" there would be a peculiar irony if Britain chose to trash its own image perhaps by highlighting winter flooding of homes or the carnage of a Saturday night A&E ward*.

There are precedents. In 2007, Eurostar ran adverts in Belgium for its trains to London depicting a tattooed skinhead urinating into a china teacup. It remains unknown if any discussions have taken place over personalities who could carry off a similar exercise in anti-nation branding.

[...] Other reported options include making it tougher for EU migrants to access public services. Another is to deport those who move to Britain but do not find work within three months.

The Home Office has not produced an official estimate of how many of the 29 million Romanian and Bulgarian citizens will take advantage of their new freedoms when controls are lifted.

Campaign groups such as MigrationWatch have predicted that 250,000 will come from both countries over the next five years, although these figures are disputed. One Tory MP, Philip Hollobone, has claimed that Romanian and Bulgarian communities will treble to 425,000 within two years.

These figures have been questioned by experts, because they are based upon the numbers of Poles and Czechs who moved to Britain in 2004. Then, only three countries opened their borders. This time, all of the 25 EU states will lift Labour market restrictions.

Buoyed by Cameron's offer of an in-out referendum, a growing number of Tory MPs now believe the UK should block the lifting of restrictions even if it were to prompt a row with the European commission.

The idea, however tentative, appears to clash with the billions of pounds Britain spent on the Olympics, partly to drive up the country's reputation. It also emerged as the Home Office launched a guide to Britishness for foreigners who would be citizens which opens with the words: "Britain is a fantastic place to live: a modern thriving society".

The Guardian, 27th January 2013

*A&E ward: accident and emergency department of a hospital