

Passport price to rise?

source: NO2ID Expats Group, 26 March 2007
STEEP PASSPORT PRICE HIKE FOR BRITISH EXPATS
RENEWALS BEFORE 1 APRIL WILL BEAT THE RISE
 For British citizens living abroad, the price of a passport will rise to 119 pounds sterling from 1 April (about £176 or US\$223.40 at today's rates). With a few months' delay, passport charges to British expats are following those applied within the UK itself. The steep increase will help to pay for interrogations, ID cards, fingerprinting and a new, intrusive database, the National Identity Register, which will build up an 'audit trail' of each citizen's ID use. British passports will now be among the most expensive in the world. News of the price rise emerged today during a campaign by British expats to mark ID-Day, organised to protest against the opening of the first ID interrogation and fingerprinting centres in the UK. A campaigner who phoned a British consulate was told about the increase during the conversation. Behind today's action is NO2ID, the non-partisan British organisation campaigning against the introduction of ID cards and a database state. Contacted by a member of the NO2ID Expats Group, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) confirmed that the cost of a passport will be going up by £100 on 1 April over the world. An official said that she did not know the precise figure, but that 119 pounds sounded about right. The NO2ID Expats Group campaign of e-mail protests continues. Full details and a link to the FCO the NO2ID Expats Group website at <http://no2id-expats.ch>. All British citizens living outside the UK are invited to take part, via the website.

Given the linkage made by the present UK government between its ID scheme and entitlement to British passports, expats are seeking assurances that they will not be subject to interrogation nor to fingerprinting or iris-scanning at a British consulate or embassy when renewing their passports. The NO2ID Expats Group warns that an interrogating role for consulates and embassies would inevitably damage their relationship with British citizens living abroad. But it is also concerned by reports that interrogation and biometric enrolment of British citizens abroad might be subcontracted to private firms. It points out that subcontracting would raise data security risks even greater than those already created by the proposed scheme.

In reply, one British consulate confirmed today that it is currently awaiting guidance on the future role of our Post in delivering local biometric services. Meanwhile, it has emerged that the biometrics in the new ePassports issued by EU countries will in any case not comply with US requirements. In a bid to salvage its widely discredited US-VISIT border control programme, the US will soon be demanding ten fingerprints instead of two. Austrian public service broadcaster the ORF questioned the German government about this. Germany currently holds the EU presidency. The German interior ministry's reply, as quoted by the ORF: "The aim of introducing electronic passports is the secure comparison of the checked person and the document when crossing a border [1:1 verification], for which two fingerprints are suitable and entirely adequate ... The European concept does not provide for a database comparison [1:n identification] such as takes place, for example, in the USA within the framework of the US-VISIT programme." The Austrian broadcaster also notes that the EU passports cannot even be matched against European police databases of criminals' fingerprints, currently being networked EU-wide. So "wanted criminals who get a corrupt official anywhere in the EU to issue them with a passport in another name, but with their own fingerprints, cannot be identified by this means". NO2ID is backed by a wide range of organisations and political parties. Details of action in the UK are on NO2ID's main website at www.no2id.net