

Romania's assurance on migrants

By Thomas Escritt
in Bucharest

Romania's prime minister will today assure his UK counterpart that European countries opening their labour markets to Romanian citizens will not experience a flood of migrant workers.

Calin Tariceanu told the *Financial Times* it was unrealistic to expect large outflows of migrant workers when his country's economy was booming. "You have to take into consideration the fact that Romania has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe. It is clear nonsense to expect floods of Romanians to go to the UK."

Unemployment in Romania stood at less than 5 per cent at the beginning of this year.

Mr Tariceanu was speaking ahead of today's one-day visit, in which he plans to raise the issue of labour mobility at a meeting with

Gordon Brown, the British prime minister.

"It is an issue of principle," Mr Tariceanu said. "I do not want by achieving this to ensure the possibility of many Romanians arriving to work in England." The issue was about the principle of attaining equal treatment for Romanian citizens within the European Union, he said.

After being taken off guard by the wave of migrant workers, particularly Polish nationals, who flocked to the UK to work after the 2004 wave of enlargement, the government chose to close its labour market to citizens of Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the EU at the beginning of this year.

Romania's accession did not unleash the feared wave of emigration. Rather, the largest single decline in the size of Romania's labour force took place in 2002, when the country's citizens

first gained visa-free access to the EU. Its labour force shrank by 12 per cent during that year.

Mr Tariceanu said the anti-Romanian sentiment unleashed by a murder in Rome last month was purely local. "The anti-Romanian feeling does not extend beyond Italy, fortunately."

He added that responsibility for law and order had to remain with the host countries, even though Romania was doing what it could to help the Italian authorities deal with crimes committed by Romanians in the country.

But local authorities had to share some of the responsibility: "The situation deteriorated in Rome because the local authorities were very permissive. The creation of camps for the immigrants was probably the best way to fuel criminality."

The situation in Italy was improving, he said, but the

episode had come at a clear cost to perceptions of Romanians in Italy. The Italian government last month passed a decree making it easier to expel EU citizens accused of crimes. Since then, 300 Romanians have been expelled. Mr Tariceanu said the European parliament considered some aspects of this decree "disputable". It was for the Commission to rule on the deportation decree for the future, he said.

● Mr Tariceanu has said Romania can easily afford generous increases to the state pension. Under pressure from the opposition Social Democrat party, whose parliamentary votes keep the minority government afloat, Romania is implementing a 43 per cent increase, with a rise of 30 per cent planned for 2009.

"The pension increases do not influence the budget deficit," he said.