

EU parliament targets 'unlawful' border checks



Coelho: "They are breaking the rules and the European Commission is silent" (Photo: www.carloscoelho.eu)

By [Nikolaj Nielsen](#)

BRUSSELS, 29. May, 08:34

The European Parliament is voting on a report that describes the reintroduction of internal border checks by a half dozen member states as unlawful.

The author of the paper, Portuguese centre-right MEP **Carlos Coelho**, told EUobserver that national governments were putting the EU's passport-free Schengen zone and the free movement of its 400 million people in danger.

He is demanding the European Commission take stronger action, given that its plans to have the internal controls lifted are being ignored by EU states.

"According to the Schengen regulation they are unlawful because they have a maximum duration of two years and now they are prolonging more than two years. They are breaking the rules and the European Commission is silent," he said.



EU funds have contributed to the deployment of 545 border surveillance systems between 2007 and 2010 (Photo: Nikolaj Nielsen)

Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden and non-EU Schengen state Norway have all reintroduced controls over the years, with their latest extensions set to expire in mid-November.

Most were launched following the large inflow of people seeking international protection in 2015. Such controls were introduced 36 times from 2006 to 2015 and then 50 times up until the end of 2017.

"The border between Slovenia and Austria is not a problem any more or when we look at figures [of migrants coming] into Norway, figures are extremely low," said one European Commission official, who asked not to be named, at an event last November in Brussels.

The states say the controls are justified over wider terrorism fears and secondary migration flows, in which people who entered the EU via one or other southern member state then travel further north to settle.

But **Coelho** and his report, which will be debated on Tuesday (29 May) in the Strasbourg plenary before going to a vote on Wednesday, says there is little evidence to justify the controls.

EUobserver discovered similar views last year after it obtained respective national government documents which broadly failed to provide any conclusive evidence to back their threat assessments.

Meanwhile, the commission has made repeated demands for the EU states to lift the restrictions, but to little avail.

Last September, it also proposed to reform the Schengen code to give governments more legal means to extend the checks on the basis that they first filed a risk assessment with each notification.

The move comes amid broader political battles among EU states on revamping the bloc's asylum system.

The Dublin regulation reform, which determines who processes international protection applications, remains a hugely divisive issue with Hungary and other eastern states refusing to relocate asylum seekers from frontline countries such as Greece and Italy.

Coelho's report is the first time the EU parliament has weighed in on the topic.

The MEP says the plan is send member states and the commission a political message to guarantee that the free movement of people is not obstructed by fences and other barriers.

Some 1,200 km of new walls and borders were erected between 2007 and 2010 alone, long before the 2015 migration crisis.

"We hope to start a procedure, that means it is the first time the European Parliament makes a report on the state of Schengen. In a certain way you can say that parliament is trying to have a stronger role in Schengen scrutiny," he said.

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