

#Schengen at a crossroads

EU Reporter Correspondent | June 1, 2018



Member states should “foster mutual trust in the functioning of the Schengen area, cooperation and solidarity”, MEPs said on Wednesday (30 May).

The first annual report on the state of Schengen (the agreement between 26 member states abolishing passport checks and other types of control at mutual borders) addresses the main shortcomings in implementing the Schengen rules. It was approved by 439 votes to 157, with 80 abstentions.

Identified shortcomings: reintroduction of internal border checks

MEPs condemn the continued reintroduction of internal border checks due to shortcomings in the common European asylum system and due to the lack of political will, solidarity and responsibility-sharing. Many of the continued checks are neither necessary nor proportionate and are therefore unlawful, according to the text. **Currently six countries apply border controls:** France, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Members also condemn any building of physical barriers, including fences, between member states.

Action to be taken

- Need for a permanent, robust and effective Union response in search and rescue operations at sea to prevent the loss of life;
- EU member state authorities should collect information and statistical data more efficiently on how resources are managed at national level and on capabilities related to border control;

- member states should ensure swift and effective return procedures, with full respect of fundamental rights under humane and dignified conditions;
- implement a return decision taken by another member state, rather than making a new return decision, or sending an irregular migrant back to the first issuing member state;
- ensure adequate infrastructure, accommodation and living conditions for all asylum seekers, especially for unaccompanied minors and families with minors, as well as women in vulnerable situations, and;
- reform the SIS (Schengen information System) on the following issues: protection of children who are at risk or missing, the immediate, obligatory exchange of information on terrorism and mandatory exchange of information on return decisions.

MEPs **reiterated** that Bulgaria and Romania are ready to join the Schengen area and call on the Council to approve their accession.

MEPs stressed that the EU has adopted measures in the past few years to strengthen the Schengen area, such as setting up the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency, systematic checks at the external borders** on entry and exit for non-EU nationals and for EU nationals and a new **entry and exit registration system**.

The use of SIS by the UK raises serious concerns

Following an evaluation, MEPs are concerned about the UK's provisional use of the Schengen Information System (SIS), especially in the context of the future relationship with the UK as a non-EU country.

Rapporteur **Carlos Coelho (EPP, PT)**: “Schengen means freedom of movement. It is at the core of European citizenship. This report states, for the first time, the views of the European Parliament on the state of Schengen. Unfortunately, the diagnosis is not good. We must bring Schengen back to our citizens. Our message to member states is just as strong: they need to comply with all the rules, not just those they want.”

Background

It is **estimated** that the cost of not applying Schengen for all countries for two years ranges between 25 and 50 billion euros. If all countries were to reintroduce border controls permanently, the cost over 10 years would be around €100-230 billion.

According to the **Transnational Institute (TNI)**, European countries have built more than 1,200 kilometres of walls and borders at a cost of at least €500 million.

<https://www.eureporter.co/frontpage/2018/06/01/schengen-at-a-crossroads/>