



REPORT



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The future of the Schengen area –

High-level policy debate, 14 June 12.00-15.00, European Parliament

In his introduction, the Vice-President of the EPP Group in the EP, **Jean Marian Marinescu**, warned that one of the biggest achievements of the EU was currently under immense pressure both due to the instability in North Africa as well as the migratory pressure at the Greek border. He emphasized that although all conditions set by the Accession Treaty and the Schengen acquis had been met by Romania and Bulgaria, their legitimate right to accede to the Schengen area was denied by some member states, which made a link between the Schengen accession process and the mechanism of cooperation and verification. Marinescu underlined, that in Romania's point of view these were two separate issues and such a formal link would be discriminatory to Romania and Bulgaria. Curiously, some of the strongest critics among the member states were also the main foreign investors in the Netherlands. Regarding the reform of the Schengen area, Marinescu expressed his support for the measures proposed in Carlos Coelho's report and highlighted the idea of financial compensatory measures for the member states affected by the reintroduction of internal border controls. The introduction of temporary border controls should be subjected to a coordinated EU mechanism.

Romanian State Secretary **Ioan Dascalu** underlined that Schengen was about the principle of solidarity. Already now, Romania was closely monitoring and defending Europe's borders, be it its land or its sea borders. Even before the actual accession to the Schengen area, Romanian police officers had already established a high level of cooperation with their EU counterparts. Dascalu equally mentioned several examples of Romania's strong commitment in strengthening border security: One example was the FRONTEX-Project SCOMAR (Surveillance and Control at the Black Sea). Dascalu also underlined that Romania was the second biggest contributor to FRONTEX missions right after Germany. The Schengen area was not a reward, but an obligation and an additional responsibility. He expressed his confidence that the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen area would further enhance the border security of the EU.

The Schengen rapporteur of the European Parliament, **Carlos Coelho** underlined that the Schengen rules were not dysfunctional, but they were sometimes wrongly applied by the member states. In the current challenges on the EU borders, there was a need for more and not for less Europe. He also welcomed the Commission's recommendation regarding the Schengen area in its communication on migration of 4 May. Now,

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Europe was in need of a strong asylum and migration policy. Coelho criticized the system how the Schengen rules were currently applied; the evaluation system needed to be reformed: The peer-review-system did not guarantee a proper implementation of the Schengen obligations in each country. This could only be achieved by a EU system. He also agreed to introduce a possibility of limited border-controls. However, these should only be possible under exceptional circumstances. Coelho also argued for a stronger role of FRONTEX in order to help member states to solve their problems in border controls at an early stage. Finally, Coelho stressed that the Schengen Information System (SIS) was a very important tool and that it was a backbone of borderless Europe. The EU needed a good second generation of SIS- Coelho expressed the hope that by 2013 the system would work as foreseen.

The Chief Whip of the German Bundestag, **Peter Altmaier MdB**, underlined that the biggest achievements of the EU were currently under attack: the Schengen area, the Euro and the single market. But this was not due to the fact that these achievements were not functioning well, but because member states were not living up to their commitments. An example was the Danish plan to introduce border controls, which was contradicting the spirit of the Schengen area. Altmaier also supported the idea of solidarity in the wake of illegal immigration; however it had to be applied correctly: Last year Germany had taken in more asylum seekers than Italy, Sweden had equally been under a very high pressure. Solidarity should however be particularly practiced with states like Malta or Cyprus. The efforts of member states had made helping these countries until now, were however disappointing. Another problem was the lacking implementation of SIS II, the delay was now at 5 years and urged for a decision on that matter. Regarding Romania and Bulgaria, Altmaier underlined that the citizens of these countries did not have the chance to profit from any of the major achievements of the EU: they did still neither fully profit from the internal market, nor from the Euro, nor from the Schengen area. Altmaier confirmed that technically both states were meeting the respective criteria. While Altmaier acknowledged the important reforms made by Romania, he deplored that the country had lost several years after EU accession, also due to political / government instability. He therefore urged Romania to make visible efforts in combating corruption. Without establishing a formal link between these efforts and Schengen accession, Romania and Bulgaria could however decrease the mistrust of other member states by making important steps in their fight against corruption and organized crime.

In the framework of the discussion, Peter Altmaier stated that the rules should not be changed in the course of the game. He implied that some reasons for the member states position were of a domestic nature, this was especially true for minority governments tolerated by populist parties. MEP Ludford underlined that corruption was a problem which had to be addressed and urged for a stronger peer-to-peer monitoring. However she, as well as other participants advocated that the Commission should take a stronger stance on anti-corruption measures towards all the member states. Coelho and Marinescu underlined the

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enormous efforts Romania had made in fighting corruption in the last years. Several participants highlighted that many reasons against the Schengen accession were hidden reasons. State Secretary Dascalu asked for a clear target date for accession to the Schengen area, Altmaier recommended that a decision in that respect should be taken this summer.

Regarding the reform of the Schengen area and the possible introduction of temporary border controls, Carlos Coelho underlined that in the current system the member states had the right to re-introduce border controls unilaterally; they just had to inform the other member states. Coelho and Altmaier agreed that the temporary re-introduction of border controls should include both the European institutions as well as the member states. Altmaier also underlined that the EU and national political leaders should remain ambitious concerning the enlargement and the reform of the Schengen area and should overcome the resistance of particular groups. When the Schengen area was created it was done so against the explicit advice of the border police. Schengen was thus implemented without endangering domestic security. Therefore, the re-introduction of border controls should only be implemented for strictly defined situations and only for a limited amount of time.

Regarding the migration pressure on several member states Altmaier underlined that Germany had been under much stronger migration pressure in the mid of the 90s. The debate about the migration pressure on Italy had to take these facts into account. Altmaier denied that the present German coalition was more Eurosceptic than previous German governments. Germany was supporting Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area and was also strong defender of the Schengen area and the freedom of movement.

Olaf Wientzek