

# State of the Schengen area

## SUMMARY

The development of the Schengen area is one of the major achievements of European integration. The removal of checks on persons at the Schengen states' internal borders greatly facilitates the exercise of the EU freedoms of movement, which brings significant social and economic benefits.

The Schengen area has come under increased stress in the past decade, owing to multiple challenges relating to increased migration into the EU, threats to internal security and the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to these challenges, many Schengen states decided to reintroduce checks at some or all of their internal borders. Despite the prescribed temporary nature of such measures, several Schengen states have prolonged these checks for years on end. The number of Schengen states with checks at internal borders reached its peak (18 states) during the first wave of the pandemic. In May 2025, 11 Schengen states had checks at internal borders owing to serious threats related to irregular migration and/or internal security.

The Schengen area has expanded gradually in the past three decades and is now composed of 29 countries. In January 2025, Bulgaria and Romania were the latest two countries to fully join the Schengen area, 18 years after their accession to the EU. Cyprus is also legally bound to join the Schengen area, but the evaluation procedure for its full accession is still ongoing.

This briefing presents key recent figures and developments in the Schengen area, focusing on the Schengen states' measures to reintroduce checks at internal borders, and on the current situation regarding the completion of the Schengen area.

*This is an update of a briefing originally published in December 2023.*



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## Introduction

According to [Article 3\(2\)](#) of the Treaty on European Union, 'the Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime'. [Article 77](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that 'the Union shall develop a policy with a view to ... ensuring the absence of any controls on persons, whatever their nationality, when crossing internal borders'.

The establishment of the Schengen area without checks at internal borders has been one of the major achievements of European integration. The Schengen area facilitates the exercise of the [EU freedoms of movement](#), thus adding to the significant economic, social, and political benefits associated with these freedoms. According to a 2016 EPRS [study](#), for example, the estimated cost of the reintroduction of checks at all land borders in the Schengen area ranges between €100 billion and €230 billion over a 10-year period.

The Schengen area has grown steadily since the five founding Member States signed the 1985 [Schengen Agreement](#) on the gradual abolition of checks at the common borders. It now comprises 29 countries, four of which are not EU Member States. In January 2025, Bulgaria and Romania gained full access to the Schengen area after controls at all borders between the two countries and the other Member States were lifted. Cyprus is the only remaining EU Member State that is bound to join the Schengen area and for which the evaluation process is still ongoing.

Because of a number of challenges relating to security, migration and public health threats, the Schengen area without checks at internal borders has come under increased stress in the past decade. The string of [terrorist attacks](#) on EU territory and the unprecedented arrival of asylum-seekers and irregular migrants in the years 2015 and 2016 prompted several Schengen states to [reintroduce checks at their internal borders](#), many of which have been maintained until today. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to a [new wave](#) of internal border controls, which affected nearly the entire Schengen area. Lastly, the surge in irregular migration after the pandemic and new security concerns relating to the [war in Ukraine](#) and conflicts in other regions triggered the reintroduction of checks at the internal borders between several Schengen states.

## Temporary checks at internal borders

[Regulation \(EU\) 2016/399](#) (the Schengen Borders Code – SBC) lays down the rules governing the movement of persons across borders, including the conditions under which Schengen states may temporarily reintroduce checks at internal borders. According to the SBC, Schengen states may exceptionally and temporarily reintroduce border controls at their internal borders as a measure of last resort to deal with serious threats to public policy or internal security, or in cases of persistent serious deficiencies relating to the management of EU external borders.

### Grounds for the temporary reintroduction of checks at internal borders (SBC)

Schengen states may **temporarily reintroduce checks** at their internal borders to deal with serious threats to public policy or internal security in cases of:

- an **unforeseeable serious threat to public policy or internal security** that requires immediate action – border control for up to 1 month, renewable up to a maximum of 3 months (Articles 25-27a)
- a **foreseeable serious threat to public policy or internal security** – border control for up to 2 years, with an additional 1 year in 'major exceptional situations' (Articles 25-27a);
- a **large-scale public health emergency** that puts at risk the overall functioning of the Schengen area – border control for up to 6 months, renewable for as long as the situation persists (Article 28);
- **persistent serious deficiencies relating to external borders** – border control for 6 months, renewable up to a maximum of 2 years (Article 29).

## Overview of temporary checks at internal borders

According to the SBC, measures to reintroduce checks at internal borders should be temporary, exceptional, and constrained by a series of temporal and procedural limitations. This was the case for almost a decade after October 2006 (the entry into force of the SBC). In this period, only a few Schengen states reintroduced checks at their internal borders. When checks were reintroduced, these were in relation to foreseeable events (political summits or sports competitions) and lasted for a short period of time. **Before September 2015, there was never a case where more than two Schengen states had simultaneously reintroduced checks at their internal borders** (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Number of Schengen states with checks at their internal borders (2014–2025)



Data source: [European Commission](#), 2025.

Since November 2015, however, there have always been at least 6 Schengen states with checks at their internal borders. This number increased dramatically in 2020 and 2021, reaching **a maximum of 18 Schengen states at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020**. Six Schengen states (Germany, Austria, France, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) reintroduced checks at their internal borders in 2015 because of concerns over the situation at the EU's external borders and/or security threats, and they continue to have them in place to this day. By May 2025, each of these Schengen states had accumulated about 3 500 days with checks at their internal borders (see Figure 2).

**As of 5 May 2025, 11 Schengen states had checks in place at one or more sections of their internal borders in response to the current migration and security threats:**

- **Austria:** land borders with Czechia and Slovakia (until 15 October 2025); land borders with Hungary and Slovenia (until 11 May 2025);
- **Bulgaria:** land borders with Romania (until 30 June 2025);
- **Denmark:** land and sea borders with Germany, extensible to all internal borders (until 11 November 2025);
- **France:** all internal borders (until 31 October 2025);
- **Germany:** land borders with France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Czechia and Poland (until 15 September 2025);
- **Italy:** land borders with Slovenia (until 18 June 2025);
- **The Netherlands:** land and air borders with Belgium and Germany (until 8 December 2025);
- **Norway:** ports with ferry connections to the Schengen area (until 11 November 2025);
- **Slovakia:** land borders with Hungary and Austria (until 7 July 2025);
- **Slovenia:** land borders with Croatia and Hungary (until 21 June 2025);
- **Sweden:** land borders with Denmark (until 11 November 2025).

## Policy developments

In February 2021, the French Presidency of the Council of the EU proposed the establishment of a Schengen Council [formation](#) to discuss strategic aspects of Schengen and to provide general political guidelines on the state of Schengen.

In June 2021, the European Commission presented a new [Schengen strategy](#) to address the multiple challenges and [shortcomings](#) relating to the functioning of the Schengen area. The strategy was accompanied by a proposal to revise the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, which was adopted into [law](#) in June 2022.

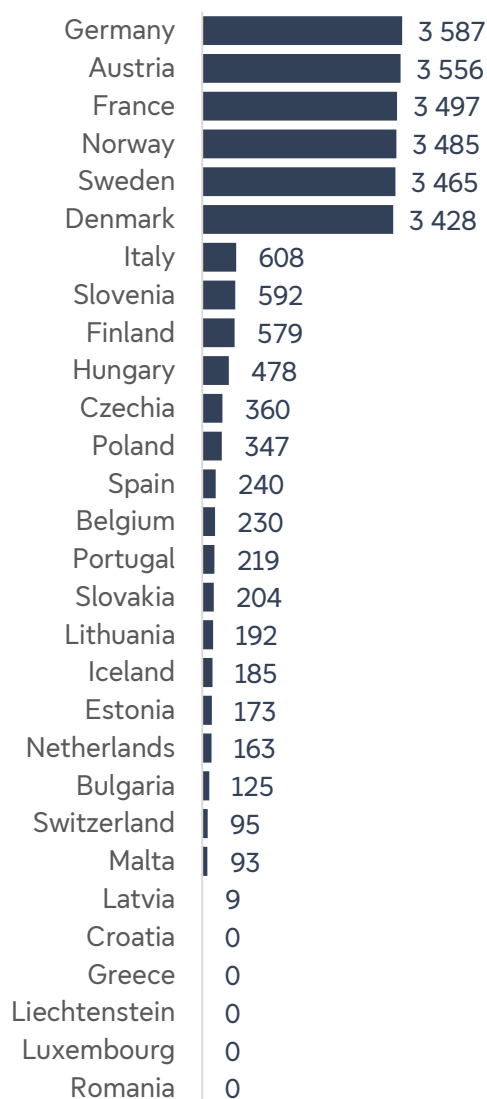
In May 2022, the Commission presented its first [state of Schengen report](#), which set out a new governance model for the Schengen area. The model consists of a 'Schengen cycle' designed to ensure a regular 'health-check' on the state of Schengen. A Schengen Coordinator was appointed in June 2022 to support this new governance framework. The Commission started developing a Schengen barometer to provide a comprehensive situational picture of the key drivers having an impact on the stability of the Schengen area.

In December 2021, the Commission [proposed](#) an amendment to the SBC, which included revised conditions for temporary reintroduction of internal border controls. [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1717](#), adopted in July 2024, sets out a new framework for the reintroduction of internal border controls, with revised deadlines and new monitoring and reporting requirements. It allows the Schengen states to extend their internal border controls for up to 2 years, with an additional 1 year 'in major exceptional situations'. The law also clarifies the measures that may be used as an alternative to border controls (such as police checks) and introduces a new procedure for the swift transfer between Member States of third-country nationals apprehended in border areas.

In April 2022, while the negotiations on the proposal amending the SBC were ongoing, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued a [judgment](#) (cases C-368/20 and C-369/20) upholding a strict interpretation of the SBC with regard to the maximum period of time during which Member States can apply checks at their internal borders. The Court maintained that the SBC precludes a Member State from reintroducing internal border controls based on a serious threat to its public policy or internal security (Article 25 of the SBC), whenever the duration of the reintroduction of internal border controls exceeds the maximum total duration of 6 months and no new threat exists that would justify applying anew the time periods provided for in Article 25.

In November 2023, the Commission issued a [recommendation](#) on increased cooperation between Member States to address serious threats to internal security. The recommendation was accompanied by a [report](#) on the consultations carried out by the Schengen Coordinator with Member

Figure 2 – Cumulative period of checks at Schengen states' internal borders over the 2006–2025 period (in days)



Data source: [European Commission](#), 2025.

States in relation to long-lasting internal border controls. A formal consultation process was carried out between May and November 2023, both with the Member States that reintroduced border controls and with the Member States affected by those controls. In its report, the Commission noted that existing border checks are 'generally not systematic and often complemented by police measures'. It concluded that there has been 'genuine progress in stepping up information-sharing and using measures that limit as much as possible the impact of the reintroduced controls', and that 'cross-border police cooperation functions well'.

In its 2024 State of Schengen [report](#), the Commission observed that improved coordination had resulted in more targeted and flexible reintroduction of internal border controls. According to its 2025 State of Schengen report, the Commission stated that it 'ha[d] been in close contact with the countries that have reintroduced internal border control, as well as with countries affected by the reintroduction of such measures'. At the request of Luxembourg, in 2024, the Commission launched a consultation on Germany's internal border controls.

The reform of the Schengen system is closely linked to efforts to strengthen the [management](#) of the EU's external borders and to enhance the [internal security](#) of the Schengen area, including efforts to combat irregular migration and migrant [smuggling](#), and to improve the EU's system on the [return](#) of third-country nationals without the right to remain in the EU.

## Completion of the Schengen area

### Evolution of the Schengen area

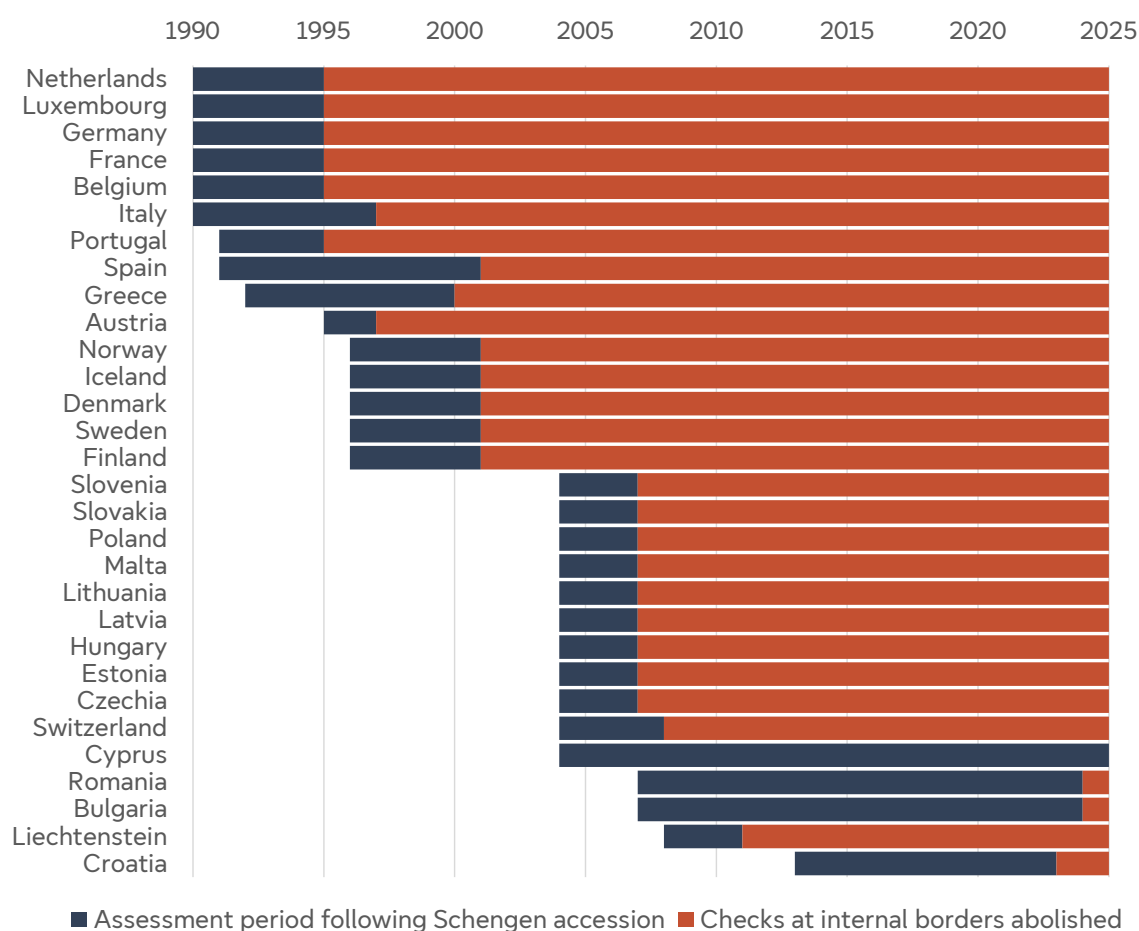
The Schengen area has expanded gradually since 1985, when five Member States of the European Communities signed the [Schengen Agreement](#) on the gradual abolition of checks at their common borders. The 1990 [Convention](#) implementing the Schengen Agreement provides that any Member State may become a party to this convention following an agreement between that state and each of the contracting parties. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam incorporated the Schengen *acquis* into the legal framework of the EU. The Schengen [Protocol](#) annexed to the Treaty provided that 'the Schengen *acquis* and further measures taken by the institutions within its scope shall be regarded as an *acquis* which must be accepted in full by all States candidates for admission' into the EU.

**As of May 2025, 29 countries were full members of the Schengen area**, where checks at their internal borders with other Schengen states are abolished (see Figure 3):

- **Germany, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands** signed the Schengen Convention on 19 June 1990; checks at the internal borders of these five Member States were [abolished](#) on 26 March 1995.
- **Italy** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 27 November 1990; checks at the internal borders with Italy were abolished in October 1997.
- **Portugal** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 26 June 1991; checks at the internal borders with Portugal were [abolished](#) in March 1995.
- **Spain** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 26 June 1991; checks at the internal borders with Spain were [abolished](#) in March 1995.
- **Greece** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 6 November 1992; checks at the internal borders with Greece were [abolished](#) in January 2000.
- **Austria** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 28 April 1995; checks at the internal borders with Austria were abolished in December 1997.
- **Denmark** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 19 December 1996; checks at the internal borders with Denmark were abolished in March 2001.
- **Finland** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 19 December 1996; checks at the internal borders with Finland were abolished in March 2001.
- **Sweden** [acceded](#) to the Schengen Convention on 19 December 1996; checks at the internal borders with Sweden were abolished in March 2001.

- **Iceland and Norway** signed the [agreement](#) on their association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis* in May 1999; checks at the internal borders with Iceland and Norway were abolished in March 2001.
- **Switzerland** signed the [agreement](#) on its association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis* on 26 October 2004; checks at the internal borders with Switzerland were abolished in December 2008.
- **Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia** [acceded](#) to the EU on 1 May 2004; checks at the internal borders with these countries were [abolished](#) in December 2007.
- **Liechtenstein** signed the [Protocol](#) with the EU and the Swiss Confederation on the accession to the Agreement between the EU and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis* on 28 February 2008; checks at the internal borders with Liechtenstein were [abolished](#) in December 2011.
- **Bulgaria and Romania** [acceded](#) to the EU on 1 January 2007; checks at the internal borders with Bulgaria and Romania were abolished in March 2024 (air and sea borders) and January 2025 (land borders).
- **Croatia** [acceded](#) to the EU on 1 July 2013; checks at the internal borders with Croatia were [abolished](#) in 2023 (January – land and sea borders; March – air borders).

Figure 3 – Timeline of Schengen enlargement



Data source: [European Commission](#), 2025.

Article 4 of the Schengen Protocol provides that **Ireland** may take part in all or some of the Schengen arrangements, subject to the Council's unanimous approval. Ireland requested to participate partially in the Schengen *acquis* without having to abolish checks at internal borders.

## Accession to the Schengen area

The Schengen Convention established an Executive Committee to implement its provisions, including to decide on a country's readiness for the abolition of checks at its internal borders. After the signature of the Amsterdam Treaty, the Executive Committee in 1998 adopted a [decision](#) setting up a Standing Committee on the evaluation and implementation of Schengen, with the mandate to assess the new members' readiness to implement the Schengen *acquis* in full.

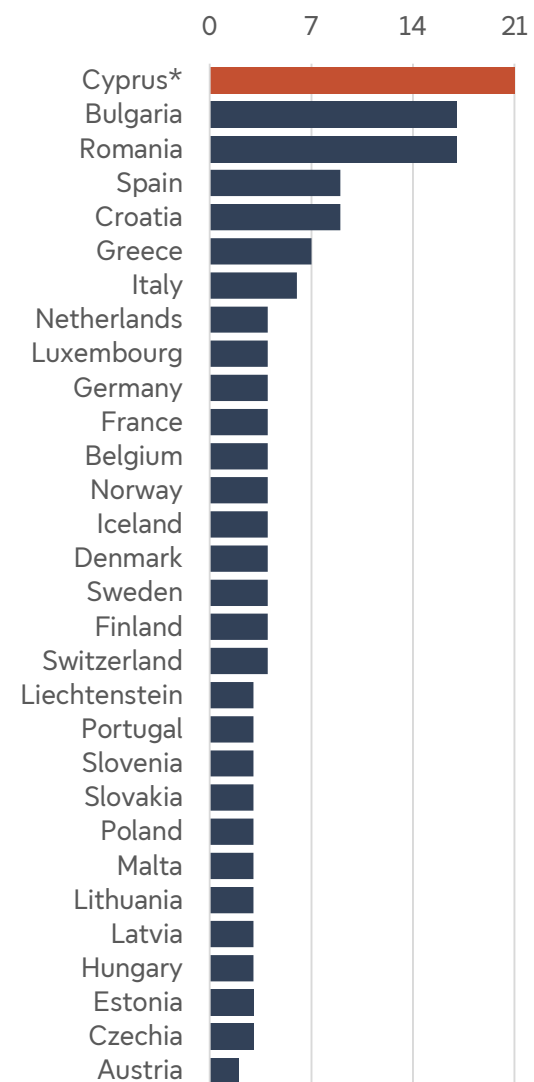
In 2013, [Council Regulation \(EU\) No 1053/2013](#) established an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to verify the application of the Schengen *acquis*. [Croatia's](#) readiness to fully implement the Schengen *acquis* was assessed under this regulation. As of October 2022, **the evaluation of new Schengen states will take place under the revised Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism.**

From a historical perspective, the Schengen evaluation procedures have taken five years on average to complete. However, these procedures lasted 17 years for Bulgaria and Romania, 13 years after the Council concluded that the Schengen conditions for the two countries had been fulfilled. In the case of Cyprus, the Schengen evaluation is still ongoing, 21 years after the country's accession to the EU (see Figure 4).

Article 4 of the Protocol to the [Act of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania](#) to the EU provides that certain parts of the Schengen *acquis*, such as the lifting of checks at internal borders, must only apply pursuant to a decision of the Council to that effect after verification in accordance with the applicable evaluation procedures. For this purpose, the Council must take its decision unanimously, after consulting the European Parliament. The procedure sets no time limit for the Council to take a positive decision on the accession of new states to the Schengen area.

The Schengen evaluation procedure applicable to Bulgaria and Romania was laid down in the 1998 decision of the Executive Committee. In line with this procedure, on 9 June 2011 the Council [concluded](#) that [Bulgaria](#) and [Romania](#) had fulfilled the conditions in all the areas of the Schengen *acquis*.

Figure 4 – Delay between the accession to Schengen and the abolition of checks at internal borders (in years)



\* Internal borders not yet abolished

Data source: [European Commission](#), 2025.

In its 2021 Schengen strategy, the Commission reiterated its call for the Council to take the necessary steps for Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia – as well as Cyprus once it had successfully completed the evaluation process – to become part of the area without internal border controls.

In March 2022, in the context of negotiations on the revision of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, Romania and Bulgaria made a [joint declaration](#) to the Council, stressing their commitment to apply the Schengen *acquis* correctly and inviting, on a voluntary basis, a team under the coordination of the Commission to assess the application of the latest developments of the Schengen *acquis*. Following this invitation, in October 2022 the Commission organised a fact-finding mission to Bulgaria and Romania to assess key elements of the Schengen *acquis*. The on-site team [concluded](#) that 'Bulgaria and Romania continue to meet the conditions necessary to apply all relevant parts of the Schengen *acquis* in full'. In December 2022, the Council prepared [draft decisions](#) on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. The Council adopted the [decision](#) on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Croatia, but could not reach consensus with regard to Bulgaria and Romania.

In March 2023, the Commission launched two pilot projects focused on improving asylum and return procedures in [Bulgaria](#) and [Romania](#). The Commission also decided to reinforce the border capabilities of Bulgaria and Romania for surveillance along their borders, through additional funding of €45 million and €10.8 million, respectively. In October 2023, the Commission [reported](#) that 'solid results have been achieved with best practices identified in the area of accelerated asylum procedures and effective returns, border management and reinforced cooperation with neighbouring countries'.

In a [reply](#) to a parliamentary question, issued in September 2023, the Commission declared that it 'will do the utmost, in close cooperation with the Presidency of the Council and with the European Parliament, to ensure that the Council takes the necessary steps for a decision (as soon as possible) in 2023 on Romania and Bulgaria to become part of the Schengen area'. The Commission also stated that it was 'aware that the persistence of the internal border controls may have additional impacts, such as those entailed by [greenhouse gas emissions](#) of vehicles waiting at border crossings'.

In February 2023, Member of the European Parliament Eugen Tomac (Romania, Renew) brought an action before the CJEU (under Article 263 TFEU) for annulment of the 'decision' of the Council of 8 December 2022 leading to the non-adoption of the draft decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Romania (case T-48/23). In October 2023, the CJEU [dismissed](#) the action as manifestly lacking any foundation in law. The Court argued that 'by refusing to act on the applicant's invitation to act, and irrespective of whether a Member State's opposition to the adoption of the draft at issue could infringe the principle of sincere cooperation between Member States, the Council did not, in any event, unlawfully fail to act under Article 4 of the Protocol to the Act of Accession of Romania to the Union'.

In December 2023, the Council adopted a [decision](#) on the lifting of checks on persons at internal air and sea borders with and between Bulgaria and Romania as of 31 March 2024. In December 2024, the Council adopted a [decision](#) to lift the remaining (land) border controls effective from 1 January 2025. In line with a [political agreement](#) between Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, Bulgaria temporarily reintroduced border controls at its internal land border with Romania on 1 January 2025.

According to the [2003 Act of Accession](#), **Cyprus** is also bound by the Schengen *acquis*. However, [Protocol 10](#) attached to the act provides that the application of the Schengen *acquis* must be suspended in those areas of Cyprus in which the government of Cyprus does not exercise effective control. The Schengen evaluation of Cyprus is underway and currently subject to the procedure set out in the revised Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism.

In May 2019, Cyprus declared its willingness and commitment to apply all parts of the Schengen *acquis* and to be subject to Schengen evaluations, to the extent possible considering the country's special circumstances. The Schengen *acquis* provisions relating to the Schengen Information System (SIS) became [applicable](#) in Cyprus starting from July 2023. According to an [answer](#) to a

parliamentary question sent by Commissioner Magnus Brunner in April 2025, 'the Commission is aware that Cyprus' integration into the Schengen area requires due respect to its special situation' and it 'stands ready to engage in a dialogue with Cyprus on how this can be achieved, including with regard to the Green Line'.

## European Parliament's position

The European Parliament has repeatedly questioned the reintroduction and maintenance of checks at internal borders and called for a return to a fully functioning Schengen area. In its 2018 [resolution](#) on the annual report on the functioning of the Schengen area, the Parliament stated that 'many of the prolongations are not in line with the existing rules as to their extensions, necessity or proportionality and are therefore unlawful'. In its 2019 legislative [resolution](#) on the Commission's 2017 [proposal](#) to amend the SBC, the Parliament opposed extending the time limits for temporary checks at internal borders, and questioned the effectiveness of the proposed risk assessment conducted solely by the concerned Member States. In its 2020 [resolution](#) on the situation in the Schengen area following the coronavirus outbreak, the Parliament criticised the 'little justification' and the 'lack of sufficient detail' provided by the Member States in their notifications on the reintroduction of checks at internal borders.

In its 2021 [resolution](#) on the annual report on the functioning of the Schengen area, the Parliament acknowledged that the SBC and in particular the rules on temporary checks at internal borders were 'no longer fit for purpose'. It noted the need to adopt 'clearer rules on public health emergencies' and suggested that each prolongation of border controls should trigger additional safeguards and oversight measures. The Parliament also called for 'a structured and transparent consultation mechanism in the event of crisis situations', to determine mitigating or alternative measures to checks at the internal borders and uniform rules that are binding and applicable at the external borders. In September 2023, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) adopted the [report](#) on the Commission's 2021 proposal to revise the SBC, which sought to clarify the conditions for extending checks at internal borders.

The Parliament has repeatedly called for the completion of the Schengen area. In its [resolution](#) of 8 June 2011, the Parliament approved the first draft Council Decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Bulgaria and Romania. In its [resolution](#) of 11 December 2018, the Parliament urged the Council to present a new draft decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Bulgaria and Romania. It emphasised that the failure to reach consensus in the Council called into question 'the unitary application of the provisions of the EU Treaties and the credibility of the EU, which continuously erodes public support for common EU policies'. In its 2020 resolution on the situation in the Schengen area following the coronavirus outbreak, the Parliament reiterated its call for the Council to present a new draft decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in Bulgaria and Romania as soon as possible. In its 2021 resolution on the annual report on the functioning of the Schengen area, the Parliament urged the Council 'to honour its commitment and take an immediate decision on the abolition of checks at internal land, sea and air borders and thus allow those Member States to rightfully join the area of free movement without internal border controls'.

In its [resolution](#) of 18 October 2022, the Parliament expressed its 'dismay' that 'the Council has failed to take a decision on the full application of the Schengen *acquis* to Bulgaria and Romania' 11 years after the necessary conditions were met by the two countries. It urged the Council to adopt its decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* to Bulgaria and Romania by the end of 2022. The call was reiterated in another [resolution](#) on Schengen accession, adopted in July 2023. On this occasion, the Parliament asked the Council 'to take note that the collateral and irreparable damage, such as that produced by the increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by the millions of vehicles per year waiting for hours at border controls, is in stark contrast with the Union's climate neutrality goals'. It also asked the Commission to 'analyse all possible procedures to defend

the right to free movement of Romanian and Bulgarian citizens', including the possibility of 'current and potential future actions before the Court of Justice of the European Union'.

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