Article

European Parliament

Schengen: what issues affect the border-free zone?

Schengen is facing challenges that might endanger its very existence. Learn more about these issues and their consequences for the border-free area.

The Schengen zone faces serious challenges ©AP Images/European Union-EP

Parliament condemned the continuation of internal border checks in the Schengen area in a report adopted on 30 May 2018.

In a report on the functioning of the Schengen zone MEPs warn that the passport-free area is under "enormous pressure". Report author Carlos Coelho, a Portuguese member of the EPP group, said: "National governments made Schengen into the scapegoat of the failures of security policies and of the weakness of common European asylum system. Yet, Schengen is

not the problem, it is the solution."

Coelho warned that rhetoric of blaming free movement could destroy the unique Schengen system: "If Schengen perishes, the Europe of citizens that we have today will vanish."

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" Schengen is not the problem, it is the solution "

Carlos Coelho

Author of a Parliament report on the functioning of the Schengen zone

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Daunting time for the Schengen area

Controls on certain borders were introduced in response to terrorist attacks in Europe and the considerable influx of refugees into the EU in 2015. The flow of migrants and asylum seekers was seen as a threat to internal security and affected member states used the provisions of the Schengen Borders Code to introduce internal border controls. They were supposed to be temporary and exceptional measures, but the normal functioning of the Schengen area has not been fully restored.

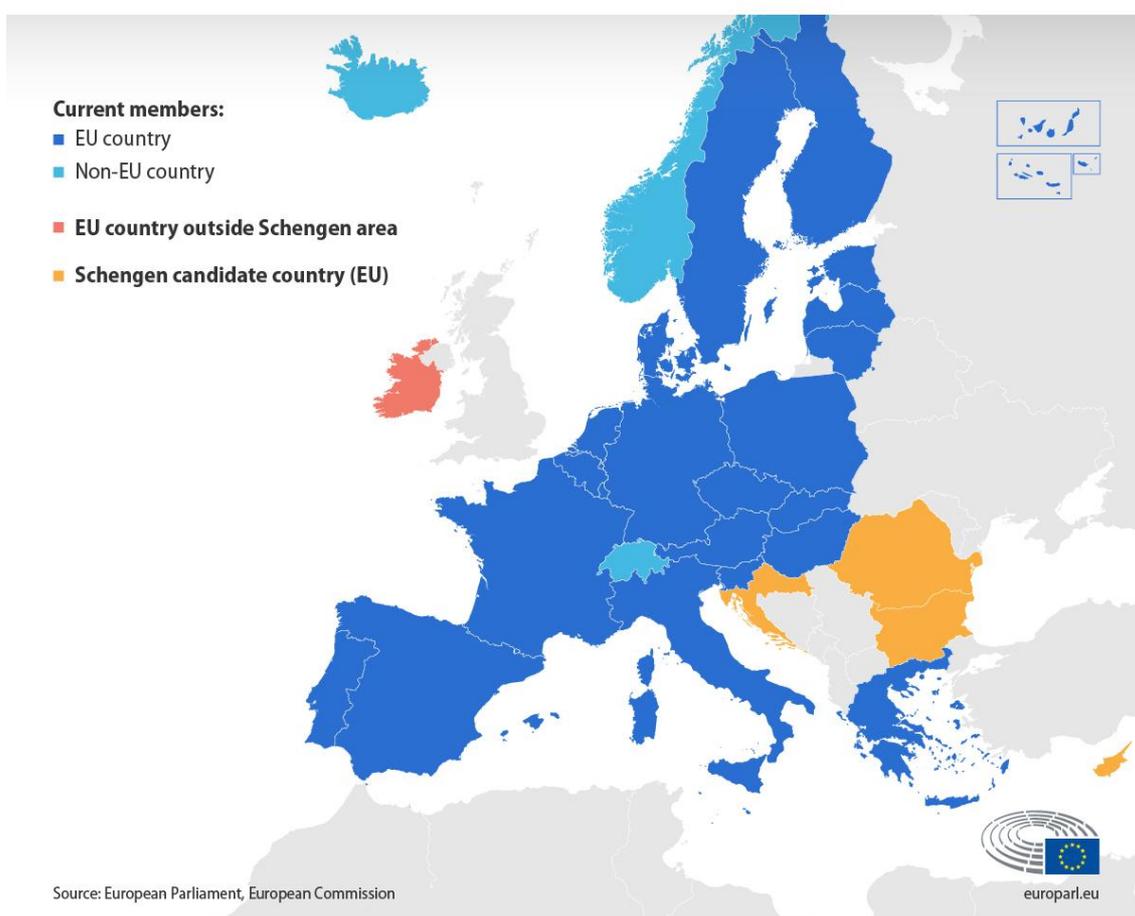The European Commission keeps an updated list of countries that apply internal border controls
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"Internal borders are still in place, mainly because we are paying the price of problems that are outside the scope of Schengen, such as asylum policy," said Coelho.

How much do border controls cost and who is affected?

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The border controls disrupt the free flow of people, goods and services across the EU. It mainly affects commuters (1.7 million people cross the border every day to work in another EU country), tourists and transport companies. In addition there are administrative and infrastructure costs for the public sector.

Over two years the cost of border controls is estimated at €25-50 billion in one-off costs and €2 billion in annual operating costs. Find out more details in our briefing.

SCHENGEN AREA

Current members:
- EU country
- Non-EU country

- **EU country outside Schengen area**

- **Schengen candidate country (EU)**

Source: European Parliament, European Commission

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Map of the Schengen zone

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Reinforcing the Schengen zone

The EU has recently adopted several measures to reinforce the integrity of the Schengen area:

- Systematic checks at the EU's external borders on everyone entering the EU - including EU citizens - were introduced in April 2017
- New entry and exit registration system to record the movements of non-EU citizens across the Schengen area and speed up controls
- Reinforced external boarder surveillance through the creation of the European Border and Coastguard Agency
- More powers for Europol, the EU's police agency, to step up the fight against terrorism

Restoring Schengen

MEPs support the European Commission's roadmap for restoring the border-free zone and have made suggestions on how to proceed. "The solution is political will," said Coelho. "Despite the European framework, borders remain national, "o only member states can change this."

Parliament says Bulgaria and Romania are ready to join the Schengen area and calls on the Council to approve their accession.

The Schengen zone in numbers

- 26: the number of countries in the Schengen zone

- 4: how many non-EU countries are part of Schengen (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland)

- 5: EU countries that are not part of Schengen (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Ireland, Romania)

- 50,000: length of the Schengen zone's external borders in kilometres

Find out more

Analysis: EU asylum, borders and external cooperation on migration
Press release: the Schengen area is at a crossroads
(30 May 2018)
Overview of articles on migration

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Parts of this article were updated in 2020 to reflect the fact that the UK is no longer a member of the EU.

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