

Parliament denounces extended Schengen area internal border controls

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In a resolution adopted by 439 votes in favour, with 157 against and 80 abstentions the European Parliament called on the member states to return as quickly as possible to the normal operational functioning of the Schengen area and to do everything possible to end the internal border controls practised by some countries.

In this report prepared by **Carlos Coelho** (EPP, Portugal), Parliament also highlights the economic costs created by these controls that are estimated to be between €25-50 billion for all countries over a two year period. If all countries were to reintroduce border controls permanently, the cost over 10 years would rise to between €100-230 billion according to the draft resolution.

On Tuesday evening in Strasbourg during a debate on this report, the Portuguese MEP explained to what extent this area of free movement had still not yet been accomplished and that the Schengen area had been blamed without any real reason. The Portuguese MEP regretted that the deadlines for these controls had *“largely been exceeded”* and had often been put into place for *“vague reasons”*. The rapporteur exclaimed that they needed to *“return Schengen to its citizens”*.

In the report adopted on Wednesday, which focuses on the annual operations of the area of free movement, MEPs therefore condemned the continued reintroduction of internal border controls *“due to shortcomings in the common European asylum system and the lack of political will, solidarity or sharing of responsibilities”*.

The text also explains that a lot of permanent controls *“are neither necessary nor proportionate and are, consequently, illegal”*. Six countries are currently carrying out controls: France, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

In this report MEPs also highlighted the need to expand the area to include Bulgaria and Romania, two countries that are perfectly fulfilling the criteria for joining the Schengen area.

Parliament is also concerned by the current and future use of Schengen Information System (SIS) data following press reports disclosing improper and unauthorised use by the United Kingdom, which does not have the same degree of access as Schengen member states. According to the *EuObserver*, the British government stole data from the SIS database, which in some cases were false and had not been updated. In reply to questions about this subject the Commission was unwilling to comment.

It should be pointed out that the EPP did not speak with a single voice on the question of Schengen controls, with the French section voting against the report. It disagrees with Schengen being opened up to Bulgaria and Romania and considers that internal controls are inevitable given the level of threats. *(Original version and French by Solenn Paulic)*