

European Parliament calls to reopen internal borders as soon as possible

After the Coronavirus pandemic

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USPA NEWS - The Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament emphasises on Tuesday that the temporary checks on Schengen borders need to be lifted in a coordinated manner as soon as conditions allow. In a debate on the current situation of the temporary Schengen border closures reintroduced following the COVID-19 outbreak, MEPs highlighted that freedom of movement is essential for the EU and that a fully functioning Schengen area needs to be restored to allow citizens to move across borders again.

Tanja Fajon (Socialists & Democrats group), the Chair of the LIBE Working Group on Schengen Scrutiny, said: "Schengen has never been at such great risk: during the pandemic it has almost completely disappeared. Countries rushed to close down their borders without much coordination. It is now crucial that we fully restore Schengen as soon as conditions allow and without any discrimination between EU citizens. European coordination is therefore essential."

Terezija Gras, Croatian State Secretary for European and International Affairs, and Monique Pariat, Commission Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs, highlighted that all border control measures need to be proportionate, non-discriminatory and applied in a coordinated manner. The Commission will present guidelines on Wednesday on lifting the border checks through a phased and coordinated approach, first on the internal borders and then on the external borders.

Many MEPs demanded clarifications on how the Commission aims to ensure the respect of non-discrimination when the border checks are lifted and expressed concern over bilateral agreements between member states. They suggested that lessons should be drawn from the situation to consider new legislation or changes to current Schengen rules. MEPs also called for Croatia's accession to Schengen after the Commission positively assessed the country's application. The debate is intended to feed into a resolution on the situation in the Schengen area, which the plenary is expected to vote on in June.

The 26 countries of the Schengen Area are only meant to reintroduce border controls between themselves in specific circumstances, and for strictly limited periods of time. In recent weeks, many of the Schengen states have reintroduced border controls, notifying them to the European Commission on the grounds of an immediate threat to public policy as a result of the spread of Coronavirus.

"As Chair of Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee, while I fully share the need for public policy measures restricting social interaction to slow down the spread of the Coronavirus, I urge member states to take their measures in full respect of the principles of proportionality and, above all, solidarity among EU Member States, non-discrimination and the applicable Schengen rules. It is key that when taking measures no discrimination is made between EU citizens," said recently the Spanish MEP Juan Fernando López Aguilar (Socialists & Democrats group).

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