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**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Second Commission report on the state of the Schengen area**

The Schengen area of free movement allows more than 400 million EU citizens from 26 European countries and an increasing number of non-EU citizens, to travel without internal border controls. Today the Commission adopted its second Schengen 'health check', a biannual overview on the functioning of the Schengen area.

The report provides a clear account of the state of the Schengen area, to ensure a coherent interpretation and implementation of the common rules amongst all Schengen participating countries<sup>1</sup>.

*"Moving freely within the Schengen area is one of the biggest European achievements. Maintaining an area without internal border controls requires an on-going effort and commitment by all of its members. It requires mutual trust, a proper European framework, transparent debates and cooperation. In order to strengthen the Schengen area we need to improve the evaluation and monitoring. I call upon the Council and the European Parliament to make progress on the on-going negotiations on the Schengen proposals",* said EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström.

This second report covers the period 1 May 2012 – 31 October 2012 and assesses in particular:

### **The situation at the external Schengen borders and within the Schengen area**

During April-June 2012, approximately 23 000 irregular border crossings were detected, which represents a 44% decrease compared to the same period in 2011 in the midst of the Arab Spring. However, the detections at the land borders between Greece and Turkey reported a 29% increase. 56% of all detections were carried out at this border section, which remains the main entry point for irregular migration into the EU. Since the redeployment in August 2012 of around 1.800 border guards (Operation Shield), controls at this border section have been greatly improved, with the Greek authorities reporting a sharp decrease of detected irregular border crossings in the Evros area.

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<sup>1</sup> 26 countries, i.e. all the EU Member States except UK, Ireland, Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus, and the non EU countries Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein

Efforts have also been made to improve the information gathering on migration flows within the Schengen area. The Commission will continue to find ways to improve the data collection and analysis of irregular migratory movements.

## **The application of Schengen rules**

During the 6 month period covered in the report, controls at internal borders have been reintroduced twice: - by Spain between 28 April and 4 May 2012 for the meeting of the European Central Bank in Barcelona on 2-4 May 2012 (669 385 people were checked at the land border with France as well as at Barcelona and Gerona airports - 68 were refused entry); - by Poland between 4 June and 1 July for the EURO 2012 football championships (28 980 people were checked at Poland's internal borders - 22 were refused entry and 15 were apprehended).

Verifications of the correct application of the rules have been carried out through on the spot checks in several participating States (via the Schengen evaluation mechanism) regarding: sea borders (in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovenia), police cooperation (in Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland), air borders (in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), data protection (in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia), SIS/Sirene (in Denmark, Iceland and Norway) as well as visa (in Latvia and Lithuania). These evaluations have not shown the type of deficiencies that would require immediate action by the Commission.

## **Visa issuance procedures**

On 10 May 2012, the Visa Information System (VIS) was successfully launched in the second region of deployment, the Near East (Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria). On 2 October 2012, it started operations in a third region, the Gulf (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). The VIS is working well and by 4 November 2012, the system had processed around 1.800.000 visa applications, issued around 1.500.000 and refused some 220.000 visas.

## **Background**

In September 2011, the Commission made proposals to strengthen the efficiency and legitimacy of the Schengen system ([IP/11/1036](#) and [MEMO/11/606](#)). In its Communication '*Schengen governance - strengthening the area without internal border control*', the Commission announced its intention to present to the EU institutions, twice a year, an overview on the functioning of Schengen.

These reports provide the basis for a debate in the European Parliament and in the Council and contribute to the strengthening of political guidance and cooperation between the Schengen countries. The first Commission report was adopted last May ([IP/12/481](#)) and discussed in the Council on 7 June 2012 and in the Parliament on 4 July 2012.

In addition, negotiations on the two legislative proposals put forward in September 2011 are on-going and the Commission is optimistic that a satisfactory compromise between the legislators can be found.

These legislative proposals provide for a stronger, EU-based evaluation and monitoring system to verify and ensure the application of the Schengen rules, and for a more structured European decision-making mechanism that could allow, in truly exceptional situations, for the temporary reintroduction of internal border controls in case of serious threats to public policy or internal security.

## **Useful Links**

Cecilia Malmström's [website](#) and [Twitter](#)

DG Home Affairs [website](#) and [Twitter](#)

Contacts :

[Michele Cercone](#) (+32 2 298 09 63)

[Tove Ernst](#) (+32 2 298 67 64)