



# MEPs give their views on reintroduction of border checks in Schengen area

Plenary sessions

**Calls by Paris and Rome for the temporary reimposition of border controls within the Schengen area as a response to the sudden influx of North African refugees were debated with the Hungarian Presidency and the Commission this afternoon. Many speakers wanted better control of refugee and immigrant flows but some questioned whether a crisis even exists. Most were very hostile to any attempt to circumvent the principle of a border-free Europe.**

**Enikő Győri (Hungarian presidency of the Council)** said the refugee crisis was a "serious challenge forcing a re-think of border management". She announced the Council would look into "how to guarantee free movement and a high level of internal security" ahead of June European summit. Any revision of rules should allow temporary reintroduction of controls but only on objective criteria and with agreement at EU level, she added.

**José Manuel Barroso (President of the European Commission)** emphasised that "Free movement is to Europe what foundations are to buildings: remove it and all structure is undermined". "The option [of reintroducing border controls] exists under the Schengen system for exceptional circumstances. These exceptions should be an absolute last resort".

"Countries which are directly exposed [to migration flows] are not expected to deal with this alone. (...) Immigration is a European challenge, so it requires a European response".

The first of the MEPs to speak, **Manfred Weber (EPP, DE)**, said that Schengen was a key success of the European project. Citizens "feel it everyday when they're on the road". "We will defend the principle of Schengen". He took the example of Sweden that took 25,000 refugees every year and "nobody had the idea, because of this situation, to put Schengen into question". He also said that Bulgaria and Romania's access to the Schengen area should not be delayed because of this kind of debate.

According to **Martin Schulz (S&D, DE)**, 25,000 migrants crossing the Mediterranean was not a crisis and could easily be handled with proper burden-sharing. Schengen already had sufficient mechanisms to deal with extraordinary situations. He blamed France and Italy for first creating the problem and then demanding closure of the borders to solve it: "You can't simply suspend the rights of European citizens this way". "We are losing the European Spirit".

**Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE)** spoke of a "ping pong game by two governments on the back of refugees". Reintroduction of internal borders is "against the essence of the EU" and "out of proportion" compared to the extent of the problem. "We will fight with all groups against the reintroduction of border checks".

In the view of **Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK)**, "Now is the time to focus on not only providing free movement but also better guarding the borders. (...) Now there are challenges that did not exist before: large scale unemployment, migration from North Africa, terrorism. The current system is flawed and ill-equipped for these new circumstances."

# Press release

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Greens, FR)** recalled that when there was the war in Bosnia, the EU took in many refugees. "Germany took several hundred thousand and it still hasn't sunk!" He called for solidarity within the EU. "Stop telling us that Africa's problems are a security problem". Moreover, "checks at [internal] borders will be facial checks: those who are tanned, who are different, will be checked".

According to **Rui Tavares (GUE/NGL, PT)**, we cannot and must not set aside Schengen. To do so would be harmful for Europe. There is no way we can accept it. We must protect the citizens but that also means people in Syria, Benghazi and elsewhere.

**Nigel Farage (EFD, UK)** told the House "The row that has blown up between Italy and France shows that when there is a crisis it is the nation state that wins. [To Barroso] You attack those who want to control their own border as xenophobes, as extremists, as populists. But the populists are actually democrats."

## Fact box

(Source: EC)

- 650 million people cross the borders of the Schengen area per year
- since the beginning of the year more than 20,000 migrants have managed to enter the EU irregularly
- the migrants went mainly to Italy and Malta
- in 2010, there were some 257,800 asylum seekers registered in the EU
- EU contribution for refugees stands at €100 million in humanitarian aid

*Procedure: Council and Commission statements*

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