

Beat: Politics

Europe opens the door to the reintroduction of borders in the Schengen area

EP defends some restrictions

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USPA NEWS - For months, Europe has been experiencing a heated debate about the suspension of the free movement of people in the Schengen area, the name by which the countries that opened their borders to citizens of other European countries are named. Islamist terrorism, the growing immigration of people from Africa and Muslim countries, and organized crime have led some countries to raise the need to reinstate their borders, as a means of protecting themselves. On Thursday, the European Parliament set its position on the debate and proposed some restrictions.

According to the European Parliament, the suspension of free movement of people in the Schengen area should be temporary and limited to a maximum of one year, compared to the current two years. The code regulating the functioning of the Schengen area allows member countries to carry out controls at their national borders for a limited time, if they detect a serious threat to security or public order. With a view to the negotiations that it will hold with the EU Council on this matter, the European Parliament considers that the initial period for border controls should be reduced to two months, compared to the current six months, and that the controls may be longer than a year, compared to the two allowed so far.

MEPs stress that temporary controls affect the free movement of people, so they should only be introduced in exceptional circumstances and as a last resort. In this sense, according to the proposal of the European Parliament, countries should prepare a detailed risk assessment if they intend to extend the controls beyond the initial two months. In order to maintain controls for more than six months, the European Commission will have to comply with the rules before submitting them to the Council's decision. Parliament also asks to be informed throughout the process.

The text was supported by 319 MEPs, 241 voted against and 78 abstained. Discussions with EU ministers on the final formulation of this matter may begin when the European Council sets its own position. All EU Member States are part of the Schengen area except Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom, as well as Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Six of the countries apply controls at their internal borders since 2015. They are Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway - because of the migration crisis - and France because of the terrorist threat.

For the Slovenian MEP Tanja Fajon (S & D), "Schengen is one of the great achievements of the EU. But it is at risk due to illegal controls that six countries have been carrying out for more than three years, despite the maximum limit of two years. This shows the ambiguity of the current rules and how national authorities interpret and apply them incorrectly."

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