

Strengthening the Schengen Area: Schengen Forum Meets for the First Time

News

Thomas Wahl

35 years ago, on 14 June 1985, France, Germany and the three Benelux States signed the Schengen Agreement that removed internal border controls between those Member States. Today, the Schengen area encompasses 26 European states with over 400 million citizens. Since several years, the area has become under pressure (e.g. migrant crises, terrorist attacks and the corona pandemic, which all led to the reintroduction of internal border checks). Today, the Schengen model is confronted with a different reality than at the time of the creation of the area. Against this background, the EU takes steps to make the Schengen area stronger and more resilient. On 30 November 2020, the Commission convened the **first ever Schengen Forum**. A videoconference gathered Members of the European Parliament and Home Affairs Ministers with the aim of fostering cooperation and political dialogue as well as of building up stronger confidence in the Schengen rules.

The main topics of discussion were:

- Improving the mechanism to evaluate the implementation of Schengen rules;
- Finding a way forward on the revision of the Schengen Borders Code;
- Better managing of EU's external borders;
- Enhancing police cooperation and information exchange;
- Strengthening the governance of the Schengen area.

In the field of police cooperation, participants discussed, for instance, better use of new technologies to ensure security within the Schengen area. Police checks were considered as an effective alternative to the reintroduction of border controls. Measures such as joint patrols, joint investigation teams, cross-border hot pursuits or joint threat analysis were discussed as being alternatives to effectively address threats to security.

Ahead of the meeting, the Commission presented a report that outlined the main findings and shortcomings over the past five years in light of the Schengen evaluation programme carried out (→ related link). The Schengen Forum is to support the Commission in drafting its new Schengen Strategy, which the Commission intends to present in mid-2021. The Schengen Forum will continue to meet regularly both at political or technical levels. Targeted consultations at technical level will take place with representatives from the European Parliament and national authorities over the next months. The next meeting at political level will take place in spring 2021.

AUTHOR

Thomas Wahl

Senior Researcher
Max Planck Institute for the
Study of Crime, Security and
Law

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