

Challenges of Border Control in Europe's Schengen Area – The SCHEVAL Initiative

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Abstract

In a supranational body like the European Union, how do we understand public order and internal security in a continent without internal borders? In the 1957 Treaty of Rome, four fundamental freedoms—movement of people, goods, services, and capital—were established to strengthen the internal market and boost economic growth. However, real border-free movement began only in 1985, when five countries signed the Schengen Agreement, committing to remove internal border checks. The process required many compromises, especially regarding economic and security concerns. Despite challenges and difficult negotiations, the agreement marked a turning point in Europe's approach to borders. But why were these compromises necessary? Issues like customs, taxes, money, and—most importantly—security played a key role. Today, security is once again a central concern. With a borderless EU of 449.2 million people, how can we ensure their safety? Is current external border control sufficient, or does it need to be improved? The author of this research, an expert in Schengen evaluation, has participated in assessments across several member states—including Greece, Poland, the Baltics, Italy, Spain, and others—on behalf of the European Commission since 2012. Each evaluation focused on identifying weaknesses in border management and how countries respond to threats. In this presentation, the author will highlight the main threats, border-related crimes, and common shortcomings that undermine safety in a borderless Europe.

Keywords: Schengen Agreement, SCHEVAL, border controls, border management, border-related crimes, security

Introduction: A brief history of the Schengen Agreement and Convention

The Schengen Agreement has been one of the cornerstones of the realisation of freedoms during European integration and has had a significant impact on the security challenges facing the European Union. To examine the origins and development

of the Schengen Agreement, we need to look back in time. The Treaty of Rome were signed in Rome in 1957, and within this the Treaty establishing the European Economic Communities (EEC) set out the rights of free movement that the

subsequent Schengen Agreement was designed to implement (Horváth, 2011, p. 30–31). The EEC Treaty was signed in 1957 by Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands. The aim of this treaty was to create a common market that included the four fundamental freedoms of movement—goods, persons, capital, and services—with the goal of promoting further integration, economic growth, and trade. Although the treaty was a major step forward in common economic policy in terms of the common market objective it set out, the signatories agreed to harmonise it, to establish free competition between enterprises, to prohibit state aids and restrictions that could restrict or negatively affect trade between the six countries and to establish common tariffs for the customs union to ensure uniformity in foreign trade. In addition, common policies were established in these fields to regulate them jointly and to apply the measures introduced uniformly in agriculture, transport and trade, which later extended to environmental, regional, social and industrial policy. The EEC Treaty entered into force on 1 January 1958.

However, the rights linked to free movement could not yet be fully exercised here, as the abolition of borders, or more precisely the abolition of border controls and genuine freedom of movement for all persons, did not materialise. For the EEC, established by the Treaty of Rome, the aim was economic and trade integration, not the abolition of border controls between Member States.

It was precisely the aim of the drafters of the Schengen Agreement to secure these economic, commercial, and later

environmental, industrial and social freedoms by abolishing border controls altogether and reintroducing only random or ad hoc checks. In the European Union, the right of free movement for all persons within the Schengen area is established by the Treaty on European Union, and thus Article 18 of the consolidated Treaty on European Communities, in view of the creation of European Union citizenship, already states that “1. Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in this Treaty and by the measures adopted to give it effect.”¹

The Schengen Agreement aimed to secure economic, commercial, environmental, industrial, and social freedoms by abolishing internal border controls and replacing them with random or ad hoc checks. In the EU, the right to free movement within the Schengen area is guaranteed by the Treaty on European Union. Article 18 of the consolidated Treaty on European Communities states that every EU citizen has the right to move and reside freely within Member States, subject to certain conditions. The Schengen process unfolded in two phases. The first, the **Schengen I Agreement**, was signed on 14 June 1985 by five countries (Benelux, Germany, and France). It called for the gradual abolition of internal border checks. From 25 June 1985, border police and customs authorities conducted only visual

1 The Merger or Unification Treaty was signed on 8 April 1965 and entered into force on 1 July 1967, from then on, we speak of the European Communities, and then on 7 February 1992 the Treaty on European Union was signed, which entered into force on 1 November 1993.

checks on vehicles crossing borders without stopping. Nationals of EC Member States were encouraged to display a green disc on their windcreens, signalling compliance with border, customs, and currency regulations.² The agreement involved significant compromise, as Member States gave up aspects of sovereign border control in exchange for stricter external borders and increased cooperation in law enforcement and criminal matters. This cooperation included information sharing, mutual assistance, and harmonized regulations on transport, tariffs, and safety monitoring. The second phase, the **Schengen II Agreement**, signed in 1990 but only in force from 1995, implemented the 1985 Agreement. It introduced detailed rules on external border control, visas, and criminal cooperation.³ Over time, these measures were integrated into broader EU legislation, fulfilling the vision set out in the Treaty of Rome to create a unified European space.

Challenges and their evolution in the area of free movement (economic, security challenges and their balances)

Following economic and trade integration in the 1950s, Europe faced significant defence and security challenges and threats. The two world wars showed that integration had to go in a direction that would guarantee that another war crisis of this scale and with so much loss of life and damage would not occur. Initially, Europe was faced with how to defend itself in the future. NATO was created (1949), with the Warsaw Pact 'Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance' (1955) creating tensions, the nuclear threat and danger emerged, and a major arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union developed. In the meantime, Europe sought to find its place and, by extending integration and implementing the Schengen ideals, it was precisely by abolishing internal border controls between Member States that it was able to put a dent in security or, indeed, to bring Member States closer together and to act more jointly against such threats. Even as Western Europe and the states that professed the principle of freedom were being integrated, more and more Member States were joining the European Communities and the Schengen Agreement, the Communist regime in the Eastern bloc was repressive, freedoms were not respected, were restricted and the population was subjected to surveillance. Europe was thus confronted with political dictatorships and repressive states.

The 1970s-80s saw the emergence in Western Europe of extremist groups of terrorism and extremist movements

2 “*Agreement between the Governments of the States of the Benelux Economic Union, the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on the gradual abolition of checks at their common borders*” (Official Journal L 239, 2000, P. 0013 – 0018).

3 “*Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985 between the governments of the States of the Benelux economic union, the Federal Republic of Germany and the French Republic on the gradual abolition of checks at their common borders*” (Official Journal L 239, 22/09/2000 P. 0019 – 0062)

committing crimes. Examples of such extremist terrorist organisations include the Red Army Faction (Strack, 2024) of the RAF and ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna / Basque Homeland and Liberty), “*ETA is blamed for more than 800 deaths in its 34-year fight for Basque independence, and is listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, of which Spain is a member*” (Goodmen, 2023).

Finally, during this period, the oil and various economic crises (oil crises of 1973 and 1979) also caused major problems, with rising unemployment and economic decline, which together led to social discontent.

In addition, cross-border crime, the emergence and increasing organisation of various forms of criminality, no longer affected just one or two Member States, but a common area, which had to find solutions together to combat them. The emergence and management of organised trafficking in human beings, trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms trafficking, as well as the mass illegal migration that all these opportunities entail, have been a major challenge both at external and internal borders and within the territory of the Member States.

These challenges changed by the end of the 1990s, with the creation of the European Union and the Schengen Agreement, but unfortunately the threats and sources of danger have not diminished. Today, the European Union, with its 27 Member States, all but two of which are full members of the Schengen Agreement and exercise their right to do so, faces these challenges to a greater extent and with increasing frequency.

The migration crisis of the early 2010s (Urbán, 2016) is still an ongoing issue, and the measures taken to address it have not yet shown results, or have shown little results only because of changing circumstances. Member States have failed to find a solution—whether in terms of methods or instruments—that can provide reassurance to the approximately 449 million inhabitants of the European Union. One only has to think of the terrorist attacks in Spain and France, or the series of attacks in Germany (Hille & Witting, 2025), a significant proportion of which are linked in some way to illegal migration.

The war between Russia and Ukraine and the outbreak of war following the terrorist attacks on Israel have also generated changes in the EU’s areas of internal freedom of movement. Border controls are being reintroduced on a permanent basis at the internal borders of the Member States, on the grounds of public policy and public security.

Border controls have been moved to the external borders as part of the EU’s Schengen ambition, although there have been some who have argued that the removal of border controls at internal borders does not necessarily mean that stricter controls at external borders should be implemented. A filter, the strengthening of the external border at any level, is not and will not be sufficient to guarantee the security of a Europe without internal borders. The four-tiers border control model and integrated border management already guarantee greater security. We are already talking here about taking different measures from the countries that emit migration and produce the perpetrators

of terrorist acts to neighbouring third countries, external borders and the territories of the Member States. We are deploying experts, liaison officers, analysts and evaluators and carrying out joint operations. We are giving the European Union Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) more and more powers. From patrolling at sea, carrying out rescue and search tasks, to border surveillance at land borders, they are now also involved in border control at airports with their own staff under the new legislation.

Despite these challenges, it can be said that, in addition to defence policy challenges, the criminal law enforcement threat, terrorism, organised crime (including all its cross-border variants) and illegal migration remain significant challenges for Member States.

The current efforts will significantly support and assist controls at both external and internal borders through the collection, storage and prior checking of a wide range of data by the European Border Information System (EES) (Official Journal of the European Union, L 327/20, 2017) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) (Official Journal of the European Union, L 236/1, 2018). The legislation and control principle developed, including biometric data verification for entry, prior authorisation and registration applications, will provide greater certainty on the control of persons entering the area of free movement. The problem may lie in the technical design and operation of the system. The activities of the border guards, as defined in the Schengen Borders Code, who carry out border checks in the traditional sense, are

no longer sufficient to record, store and control the data at the external borders. It will be necessary to develop and introduce a form of automation, including the training and use of artificial intelligence, to process and control this large amount of data at both external and internal borders.

Development and improvement of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism (SCHEVAL)

The Schengen Agreement and its successor established a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess whether Member States are complying with the Schengen acquis and fulfilling their obligations in the areas of external and internal border control, police cooperation, visas, return, use of the Schengen Information System, criminal and judicial cooperation and data protection. The laws, regulations, treaties and decisions governing these areas are collectively referred to as the Schengen acquis.

The Schengen Evaluation Mechanisms (SCHEVAL) can be divided into three generations based on how the organisation of implementation, forms of control, training of enforcement staff, the reporting system and the consequences of the evaluation reports have evolved. The first generation includes evaluations carried out before 2013, for which a Standing Committee was set up to carry out evaluations, which empowered teams of experts to carry out on-the-spot Schengen inspections in the framework of evaluation programmes. The legal basis for this was the decision of 16 September 1998 to set up a Standing Committee to evaluate

and monitor the implementation of Schengen. Subsequently, Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013 governed the Schengen evaluations, establishing their main forms and system. Council Regulation (EU) No 2022/922 of 9 June 2022 on the establishment and operation of an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to verify the application of the Schengen acquis and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013 was adopted as the third-generation evaluation and monitoring mechanism. Although the Regulation entered into force on 1 November 2022, the new type of Schengen evaluations will be applied, planned, organised and implemented from 1 February 2023.

The current regulation will enhance the strategic nature of the mechanism and ensure a more proportionate and strategic use of the different evaluation and monitoring tools. It moves away from 'compliance' evaluations based on fragmented policy areas and thus provides comprehensive assessments of the overall performance of Member States. The new mechanism will focus on the effective implementation of the Schengen acquis, which is particularly important in the implementation of on-site visits. Procedures have been shortened and simplified to make the process more efficient. Strengthening the respect of fundamental rights in the Schengen framework and implementation of the evaluation of the Schengen acquis. Optimising the involvement of Member States' experts and cooperation with the Union. More targeted, strategic and personalised evaluations of EU bodies, offices and agencies and synergies with other evaluation and monitoring mechanisms. (Balla et al. 2024)

SCHEVAL in practice

One of the most important areas of security in the European Union is the professional, secure and consistent implementation of border controls in accordance with the relevant legislation. In order to be able to say at EU level that the internal security, public order and the sense of security of the citizens of the Member States are adequate, effective measures must be put in place and implemented.

Why do we highlight borders and their control when we talk about the internal security of Member States? The answer is not only simple, but also very complex. Everything that affects the security of Member States is directly or indirectly linked to borders. Migration, cross-border organised crime, drug and arms trafficking and terrorism are all linked to border control.

If we step outside the concept of security, although it still indirectly includes the management of legal migration, the implementation of border checks, the verification of documents with identification of persons, the control of visa requirements and the enforcement of visa procedures and visa issuing rules are also linked to borders. The control of the economy, transport and trade activities involving several Member States, and the enforcement of customs rules at external borders are also part of border control. The responsibility of transport companies for the carriage of passengers, compliance with Community rules on the carriage of goods by road are also linked to border controls. It can be seen that some aspect of society, the economy and trade is directly or indirectly linked to border control.

The Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism has two main types. One of these types is the control and evaluation of those Member States that are prepared and candidates to become Schengen Member States in the future. The other type is the set of Member States that are already members and apply the Schengen standards but need to return from time to time and assess whether these Member States are consistently complying with these border control standards.

One might ask why the Schengen control and monitoring mechanism is needed at all. The introductory part of this chapter shows the wide range of border-related activities and the significant impact that all such activities have on the internal security of borders, especially, of course, the external borders and the Member States of the European Union. If all the Member States carry out their activities consistently and in accordance with Schengen standards, it can be said that the Schengen area is safe and that the people living there feel safe. However, experience has shown that there is a significant discrepancy between the checks carried out at the external borders of the Member States, so that security is not always guaranteed and the external borders of the Member States are not always checked in tier 3 of the four-tier border control model. What do we mean by this? What we mean is that if a Member State does not have sufficient manpower to carry out border surveillance or border checks, this screening is already somewhat compromised. If a Member State has adequate staff, but they are not qualified, trained, knowledgeable or able to analyse the information given to them and draw the right conclusions, they cannot be expected

to make professionally sound decisions. Once again, the security of the external borders is compromised. Continuing the line, let us look at the technical means. If the Member States acquire the appropriate technical equipment from funds provided by the European Union and train their own staff to use it, they can - of course, if the equipment is acquired for the purpose - ensure that the external border is properly controlled. If, however, the technical equipment acquired is not used or cannot be used, or is not at all suitable for targeted control, then once again the security of the Member States of the European Union is called into question.

The purpose of the Schengen control is therefore to establish in practice whether the Member State has the staff, forces and means to carry out the tasks, whether the staff are suitably qualified to carry out these border control tasks, whether the technical means used are effective for the effective implementation of border control and whether the procedures generated by border control comply with the standards of the Schengen acquis. The aim is not that all Member States should have the same organisation with the same number of staff and the same technical means, but that the professional response to the risks should be guaranteed by the organisation and measures put in place in the Member State and the technical means available.

In practice, Schengen control consists of 3 main parts. In the first stage, a set of questions containing the basic questions formulated by the Committee for all actors and elements of the European integrated border management is made available to a selected and trained team of experts. In the

second stage, after having studied the set of questions, the selected experts carry out on-the-spot visits to verify the extent to which the answers provided by the Member States are translated into the implementation of the practical tasks. At the end of the on-site visit, a preliminary draft report will be prepared, which will form the basis for the third stage, when a report on the Member State will be drawn up and submitted to the specific institutions of the European Union. These three stages are not the end of a Schengen evaluation, because a follow-up method has been developed, which means that the Member State concerned must draw up an action plan in response to the recommendations and shortcomings contained in the report and implement the tasks set out in the plan. A new provision in the EU Regulation 2022 is that such action plans can also be followed up by monitoring visits and repeated on-site visits.

Experts participating in the on-site visits are professionals with professional experience, who are knowledgeable in the area being audited, have appropriate training and are familiar with the human management economic technological and procedural issues that are being monitored.

An on-site visit is carried out as follows. The on-site committee receives basic information from liaison officers who know the Member State well, from an expert contracted by the Fundamental Rights Agency and from the experience of previous inspection reports. The on-the-spot committee is further subdivided into sub-groups according to the areas of expertise to be checked. In this way,

the full spectrum of border control is covered, from technical activities to the implementation of horizontal elements.

The Member State evaluated provides further detailed information in the form of a presentation to the experts on the spot at central, regional and local level. At all levels, the experts interview the staff working there and observe the implementation of their activities. They regularly conduct situational assessments, which involve presenting real-life scenarios to border control staff and evaluating the accuracy of their responses, the implementation of planned measures, the effectiveness of technical tools, and the efficiency of procedures. During the on-site visits, the answers to the series of questions are compared and the extent to which border control is being carried out is established from the available statistical data. Where border-related infringements are detected, conclusions are drawn on the effectiveness of the staff at the external border in carrying out their tasks. For example, in the area of border traffic control, the volume of border traffic is compared with the detected infringements, the refusals of entry and the sanctions applied.

There are three ways of assessing the professional activity checked. They may decide that the activity complies with the Schengen rules and that no further action is required. They may conclude that the inspection partially meets Schengen requirements and thus make recommendations to improve its effectiveness. In cases where the Member State concerned does not carry out border control tasks or carries them out in a way that is completely contrary to Schengen

standards, they will conclude that the activity is inadequate. In the latter case, proposals are also made on the measures to be taken by the Member State to ensure that border control is carried out in a secure and compliant manner. The aim of the Schengen audit is also to collect and highlight the positive aspects and thus seek to identify best practices for each Member State. By identifying these best practices and sharing them at Member State level, the Schengen Evaluation Committee seeks to ensure that the best and most effective methods and tools are used to tackle border-related offences at all external borders.

In the following section, I will use practical examples to illustrate the extent to which border control shortcomings affect the internal security of the European Union and thus of the Member States. Given that the reports on the control of each Member State are not publicly available to the EU Commission and the Member State concerned, and I will not name the Member States, I will describe in general terms the weaknesses encountered in each area, which are both a serious risk and a security challenge for the control of external borders.

Generally speaking, most Member States have shortcomings in terms of staffing. This is particularly the case in the area of border control. The problem is not necessarily the number of staff available - although this is what generates all the others - but the lack of preparedness, training, professional experience, practice and routine. According to the provisions of the Schengen Borders Code, "*Member States shall deploy sufficient staff and sufficient means to carry out checks at external borders in*

accordance with Articles 7 to 14 in such a way as to ensure an efficient, uniform and high level of control." (Official Journal of the European Union, L 77/1, 2016)

The quoted text is short, but it carries a significant risk. The lack of adequate staffing does not guarantee the continuity of border crossings, nor does it guarantee the implementation of border surveillance activities. Several Member States are trying to make up the shortage of staff quickly, without any preconditions or expectations. However, they are not trained, they are not able to identify dangerous situations, to detect persons they should be dealing with or they are at the front line of border control to prevent the entry of persons posing a risk. There are Member States where these '*civilian*', quickly recruited police officers wear neither uniforms nor equipment and have only minimal training. In practice, the checks they carry out at external borders consist of entering the documents they have handed over into a system⁴ and, if the system does not indicate a hit, carrying out the crossing. In such cases, the verification of the authenticity and validity of documents is reduced to a minimum, not to mention the fact that the persons subject to entry checks are interviewed at no or very low level, which does not allow the person carrying out the checks to develop any suspicions.

What threat does this pose to our internal security? It allows the travel and free movement of people who may in some way threaten security, be linked to criminal or terrorist organisations or be individual

4 National border control systems that consult with European data bases in order to prevent entry of the wanted or other persons.

perpetrators for one reason or another. This risk could be reduced by ensuring that the number and qualifications of staff carrying out border checks at the external borders are sufficient. Even then, it would not be possible to fully detect future offenders, but the security risk could be significantly reduced.

Closely related to staff is the failure to use the technical means at their disposal to check the authenticity of documents. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, it has been observed on several occasions that they are not even aware of the correct use of the equipment and the security features of the documents, so that even if the person carrying out the checks were to check them in every case with the technical equipment, he or she would not be able to detect those crossing the border with forged or falsified documents. On the other hand, border traffic is increasing to such an extent that waiting times must be reduced, to the detriment of security, and passengers must be able to cross border crossing points as quickly as possible. The latter is in stark contrast to guaranteeing the security of Member States, even the Schengen Borders Code cited above allows for the possibility of introducing relaxation (Official Journal of the European Union, L 77/1, 2016) to avoid undesirable congestion. In both cases, the consequence is the same: people who, possibly having committed previous offences, or who are otherwise banned or deprived of their freedom to travel, do not have original and valid documents, but who can use technology to use false, forged or false-identity documents.

This type of risk can also be detected by using well-trained staff. Nowadays, automation and systems that perform automatic checks are of considerable help. European legislation is also seeking to place greater emphasis on automated checks by finding identification points that filter out a higher percentage of persons posing a threat. Facial identification and fingerprinting already provide greater security for the third stage of border control.

The next observation concerns the use of border crossing stamps. During the on-the-spot visits to some Member States, it was noted that border crossing stamps were not being used regularly. There were Member States that simply did not have a sufficient number of stamps available and Member States that allowed several third-country nationals to pass through automatic control gates at their airport without the border guard stamping the passports. Why is it important to stamp the passports of third-country nationals with a border crossing stamp? The simple explanation would be that the Schengen Borders Code provides for a stay of 90 days in the territory of the Member States in any 180-day period without a specific authorisation (visa, residence permit, etc.). However, for the purposes of this short study, from a security point of view, it is of paramount importance that the movements of persons crossing the external borders can be monitored and their presence checked by the police officers on duty in any Member State. In 2017, the European Union adopted the above-mentioned Regulation on the European Border Registration System. Under this Regulation, the time of stay, entry and exit of persons

crossing the external border will be digitally recorded and stored in a database. The implementation of this regulation has been postponed several times for various reasons, but at the time of writing it is expected that Member States will start implementation on 1 October 2025 with a six-month phase-in period. Schengen on-the-spot checks have also been carried out recently to check the level of preparedness for this Regulation. All Member States have carried out the theoretical preparations and have tried to ensure that as many technical conditions as possible are in place by the time the Regulation is implemented so as not to cause any significant disruption to border checks.

The issue of risk analysis and risk assessment is also a constant theme in Schengen evaluations and on-site visits. Based on more than ten years of experience, it can now be said that Member States have put a strong emphasis on the implementation of risk assessments and have increasingly prioritised analytical and evaluation work. The rationale behind this is that the implementation of risk analysis, with threat, vulnerability and impact as the main components, is essential for the implementation of effective border control. It is the combination of these three components that can be used to infer the magnitude of the risk of a phenomenon. Threat is defined as the force or pressure on the external border section, determined by its magnitude and probability. Vulnerability in this sense can be defined as the capacity of the system whose task it is to mitigate the threat, yet impact can be defined as the possible consequences of the threat (Frontex, 2021). At European level, the border analysis and assessment function

are carried out by Frontex in close contact with the specialised bodies and personnel of the Member States. Experience has shown that this work is very intense and thorough between the Member States' services involved in border control, which poses the problem that the results are not always shared with the enforcement services. Dissemination is of particular importance because it is precisely at the first and second line that the results of risk assessment activities need to be known and the products produced by those carrying them out need to be used and known. Frontex produces a great many of these products, which raise awareness of the risks and help to detect them during checks on persons, thereby helping to guarantee the security of the Member States. In a 2017 publication, it details risk profiles related to human trafficking. In addition to general characteristics, the publication also details the characteristics of sexual exploitation, trafficking for slave labour, child trafficking and trafficking in human beings, and provides guidance on the nationality of the most common victims. (Frontex, 2017) Another such publication includes information on the travel of foreign terrorist fighters in order to support controls at external borders and within Member States. This publication includes European Member States at risk, terrorist targets, motivations, characteristics of terrorist organisations, countries of origin and training, and assistance on how to identify these traits during border controls. The level of analysis is such that, in a possible thorough check, it even provides a visual representation of the signs of bruising from combat, thus increasing the susceptibility of border control officers

(Frontex, 2016). Further examples could be given, but it is more important that the person carrying out the checks is aware of and able to apply the information contained in these publications.

Finally, I would like to give an example that is instructive not only because it is not properly applied in border control, but also because it is a bad example of how, despite the efforts of the European Union, Member States sometimes do not even use the technical equipment that they have already paid for, even for the purpose for which they have purchased it. During several on-site visits, we observed that the high-tech equipment purchased (e.g. mobile, vehicle-mounted X-ray equipment), although acquired through lengthy tendering procedures, is stored in warehouses and garages without being used by the Member State for external border control. This is not only detrimental because some of these devices are quite expensive, but also because their acquisition and deployment were even justified for the territory in question in order to carry out secure border control.

The Schengen Control and Monitoring Committee's mission is therefore to detect and identify such anomalies and to encourage Member States to carry out checks at the external borders as efficiently as possible with the staff, training and technical means available.

Conclusions

With the development of Schengen ideals and free movement, the security challenges in the European Union have undeniably increased. However, despite this, the four areas of free movement and its extension to all EU citizens still offer proportionately more advantages, especially as everything is now in place to guarantee this freedom that has been achieved over many decades. We are able, both technically and in terms of human resources, to assess the threats to security and take the necessary measures to prevent them.

Checks at external borders are a priority and it is vital to strengthen and maintain this activity. However, it is not only external border controls that are needed to combat threats to the Member States of the European Union. The four-tier control model (Frontex, TOS EIBM, 2023-2027) already developed and the effective application of the European integrated border management system could be a solution to guarantee security.

In 2017, the European Parliament's research service already addressed global challenges in its prognosis (EP Global Trends Unit, 2017) and produced a forecast detailing the geopolitical challenges in a multipolar world, with the United States, Europe and China as the leading economic players. A major change in this political system has taken place, or is taking place, with Russia's war against Ukraine and the new political and economic direction of the United States. In addition to the political situation, there are also significant threats from smaller proxy wars, armed conflicts and conflicts involving larger countries (India - Pakistan).

There has been significant development in some areas of the economy, technology and trade. Artificial intelligence, the ability of self-driving vehicles, the acceleration of data transfer and communication enabled by IT tools have a significant impact on security risks and have the potential to help meet the challenges. On the other hand, climate change, water and food shortages will further complicate the situation in countries that are already struggling to maintain their economies and secure their livelihoods. The latter will continue to exert pressure on migration, which will be a priority to be managed, and strict controls at external borders will need to be maintained.

Organised and individual terrorist acts will continue to be present, which require the securing of resources from other criminal activities to sustain them, so there is a significant interconnection between cross-border crime, trafficking in human beings, smuggling of human beings, drugs and arms trafficking.

To address these challenges, the legislative process on borders and law enforcement has also started in 2017. Within the framework provided by the legislation, the analysis-evaluation and proper use of the information available to the authorities in the future could provide sufficient security to prevent illegal activities.

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