



## European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



### **Press remarks by Commissioner Johansson on the readiness of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia to fully participate in the Schengen area**

Brussels, 16 November 2022

Schengen is the largest area of free movement in the world. 3,5 million people crossing borders every day - for work, studies, pleasure. One third of the EU population lives in border regions. Every year there are 24 million business trips, and travellers make 1.25 billion journeys in the area yearly.

420 millions across the continent are connected in the area of free movement.

Schengen is one of the biggest achievements of the EU. Those connections grow the internal market, they grow economies. Schengen grows people's standard of living – pure and simple.

22 MS and 4 associated countries are in Schengen. Now it is time to include three more.

So today I present a Communication on a stronger Schengen with full participation of Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia.

It is high time to say welcome!

It is high time to say

Добре дошли!(Bulgarian)

Dobrodošli! (Croatian)

Bine ați venit! (Romanian)

Schengen is Europe.

These three Member States deserve to feel fully European.

To have the privilege of being a member you are bound by the Concil *acquis*. Which includes conditions, such as:

- Effective management of external borders
- Uniform Schengen visas
- Cooperation with law enforcement in other countries
- Connection to information systems, such as Schengen Information System

All this in order to maintain security within the area and in line with fundamental rights.

Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia had strongly proven that they have met all these conditions.

They have the tools, structures, and procedures in place to manage external borders, including possible security threats.

They have highly trained and dedicated staff, state of the art infrastructure and knowhow.

Bulgaria and Romania invited a fact-finding mission last month with 17 experts from MS together with experts from the Commission, and from our agencies Frontex, Europol and Fundamental Rights Agency. They assessed the developments of the legal framework, governance, and tools to manage effectively the Schengen area.

This was an answer to some remaining questions from some Member States. This mission, not only reported very positively, but also reaffirmed the two countries readiness to join Schengen. They have reinforced the application of the *acquis*.

For Croatia I would like to emphasize that, already last year, it was the first Member State to set up an Independent Monitoring Mechanism to guarantee the protection of fundamental rights at external borders.

Only two weeks ago the Croatian Government signed an agreement to renew and reinforce this mechanism.

The wait has been long, I should say too long. Expectations are high, rightly so - from authorities and at least from citizens.

The European Parliament has adopted several resolutions to support enlargement. Overwhelmingly voting to support.

Now, the Czech Presidency plan to have it on the agenda on the Home Affairs Council on 8 December.

This will be a truly European decision. Schengen has survived the turbulence of recent years. These challenges have been surmounted because of a shared European spirit. And this spirit must continue – in our modern world.

Because today Schengen is something very different from when it was created. We will soon introduce interconnected large scale IT systems, VISA information System, Schengen information system, we have Europol, we have Frontex.

And this is needed: we must have smart, strong, and interconnected control at our external borders. And intensive cooperation between law enforcement agencies and authorities.

Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia are ready join, and I should say the European Union is ready to welcome.

I expect MS to take this important, historical, positive decision. A moment of great pride, for the citizens of these countries.

And most importantly a decision in all our interests.

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