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The Internal Collapse of the Schengen Area: Are Temporary Border Controls Becoming Permanent?

Role: EU Affairs and Migration Policy Analyst
Audience: Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA)

KEY POINTS

1. The Cost of Internal Border Controls on Free Movement and the Economy.

2. External Border Security and the Field Test of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

3. Overcoming the Systemic Trust Deficit and Burden Sharing.

Summary

A prominent hypothesis suggests that the increasing internal border controls implemented by member states are shifting from temporary measures towards permanent policies thereby threatening the Schengen principle of free movement. This raises questions regarding how the entrenchment of such controls, against the backdrop of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, affects the future of the Schengen Area and the security of its external borders. The findings of this study indicate that countries such as Germany, France and Italy have repeatedly extended these controls, citing migrations pressure as a justification; meanwhile the EU has effectively suspended free movement while transforming neighboring countries into “buffer zones”. To overcome this crisis, it is proposed that rather than relying on static border controls, the EU should enhance the capacity of Frontex, ensure the effective operation of a mandatory solidarity mechanism, impose strict legal time limits on temporary controls and adopt “smart policing” practices based on the tracking of biometric data.

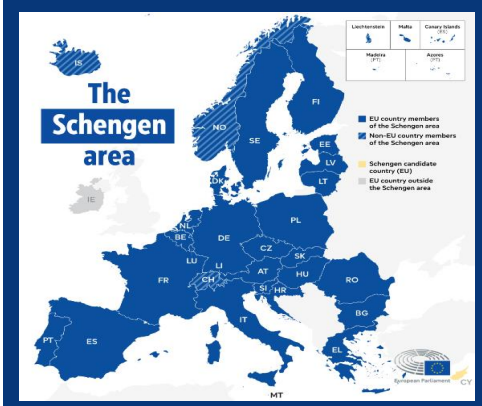

Figure 1: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20180525STO04311/schengen-what-issues-affect-the-

European Commission

1) **The persistent progressions of uncertainty and uncontrollable situations within countries**

The de facto suspension of the principle of unrestricted movement across internal borders which forms the foundation of the Schengen Agreement through unilateral decisions by member states (most notably Germany) carries very high risks. The persistence of irregular and dangerous situations is inevitable and as these conditions develop, countries will not hesitate to oppose uncontrolled movement. This situation is a structural crisis deepened by the pressured of irregular migration, security corners and the unilateral security measures taken by member states (European Commission, n.d.).

2) **Are the current potential situations ceasing to be "temporary" and becoming more permanent?**

Numerous countries – including Germany, France, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Sweden – have introduced temporary controls at their internal borders, citing public order and the management of migration as the reasons and have extended these measures multiple times (Fragomen, 2026). Domestic political corners and the efforts of countries to safeguard their own positions are causing border controls which ought to be temporary to evolve into parmanent goverment policies.

3) The desire to strengthen the security of external borders and the emphasis placed on this by the Migration Pact

The EU is turning transit and neighboring countries – such as Türkiye, and nations in North Africa – into buffer zones in order to address migration pressure directly at its own borders (Aydeniz, 2026). The European Union's New Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to shift the focus of migration managment away from humanitarian corners, transforming it entirely into a mechanism centered on " security and the protection of external borders" (Perspektif, 2026). Set to take effect by 2026, the Pact seeks to construct what is effectively an implenetrable wall along the EU's external borders, with the objective of eliminating the need for internal border controls among member states (thereby preserving the Schengen framework) [Perspektif, 2026].

4) Recommendations

It was noted that there are more effective and efficient alternatives to border controls and that measures such as selective police checks, biometric identification and technical capabilities for vehicle tracking could be used instead (Deutsche Welle, 2026).

- Standardization of External Border Protection and Screening Mechanisms.

Increasing the operational capacity of Frontex and standardizing the initial reception and identification processes in frontline countries.

- Implementation of the Mandatory and Flexible Solidarity Mechanisms.

Operationalizing the principle of "mandatory solidarity" under the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, ensuring through strict sanctions that member states that do not accept refugees fulfill their obligation to provide financial contributions or operational support (personal, technical, equipment).

- Strict Independent Oversight and Time Limits for Internal Border Controls.

Introduction of binding legal upper limits on the total duration of "temporary" border controls and the initiation of infringement procedures against practices that fail to meet the established criteria.

- Promoting Cross Border Police Cooperating and Joint Operations.

Replacing static border control with joint patrols between the law enforcement agencies of member states implementing cross border « hot pursuit » protocols and deepening data sharing (via system such as SIS II nd Eurodac).

Transitioning toward « smart policing » and technology driven oversight models designed to mitigate security risks without hindering the free movement of people.

FOOTNOTE

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2. Deutsche Welle. (2026, June 2). *AB'den sınır kontrollerinin sonlandırılması çağrısı.* https://www.dw.com/tr/abden-schengende-s%C4%B1n%C4%B1r-kontrollerinin-sonland%C4%B1r%C4%B1lmas%C4%B1-%C3%A7a%C4%9Fr%C4%B1s%C4%B1/a-77392248

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4. Fragomen. (2026, October 19). *European union schengen area : internal schengen border checks situations.* https://www.fragomen.com/insights/european-unionschengen-area-internal-schengen-border-checks-further-extended.html

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This Policy Brief has been prepared as part of the participants / students' assessment in the framework of the EU Politics lecture.

The content of this policy brief lies entirely with the author. It does not reflect the official opinion of Çağ University.