

## I

*(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)*

## RESOLUTIONS

## EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

514TH EESC PLENARY SESSION OF 17 AND 18 FEBRUARY 2016

**Resolution of the European Economic and Social Committee in support of the Schengen agreement****Free to move, support Schengen**

(2016/C 133/01)

Free movement is the most tangible achievement of European integration. The Schengen Agreement, which allows people to travel freely between countries for work, study and leisure, and which removes physical barriers to the movement of goods and services, is a cornerstone of the Internal Market which is worth EUR 2 800 bn, involves 1,7 million workers crossing internal borders and represents 57 million annual cross-border road transport movements. Removing internal border controls has played a significant role in breaking down barriers, bringing people closer together and boosting the European economy. Several generations of Europeans have grown up benefitting from Schengen without even realising it. Bringing back internal border controls would cost an estimated EUR 100 bn, representing 0,8 % of GDP; it would leave us all poorer culturally, socially and economically.

The European Economic and Social Committee fully supports the principles that led the Member States party to the 1985 agreement to declare themselves 'aware that the ever closer union of the peoples of the Member States of the European Communities should find its expression in the freedom to cross internal borders for all nationals of the Member States and in the free movement of goods and services' and 'anxious to strengthen the solidarity between their peoples by removing the obstacles to free movement at the common borders between the States [...]'. This agreement aimed to promote the union of the peoples and solidarity between the peoples. Undermining it, therefore, in addition to having alarming economic consequences, would amount to a potentially fatal blow to solidarity and to the Union itself.

The Committee also fully supports the principle which led the Member States party to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to state that 'The Union shall develop a policy with a view to [...] ensuring the absence of any controls on persons, whatever their nationality, when crossing internal borders', while also providing for effective management of external border controls (Article 77(1)).

The members of the EESC, as representatives of European civil society, are therefore increasingly concerned about the pressure being put on the Schengen Agreement. The EESC appeals to Europe's governments not to bow to populist pressure and fear but instead to defend the rights we have striven for. The Committee recognises that recent events have revealed serious shortcomings in the management of Europe's borders and our ability to trace the movements of those who want to cause harm. These concerns must be addressed, but Schengen is not the problem and should not be used as a scapegoat. The EU institutions must avoid at all cost the piecemeal unravelling of the Schengen rules, and with it the Internal Market, which will ultimately be to the detriment of us all.

The strength of the Schengen area cannot be reduced to that of its weakest link. Protecting the EU's borders should be a joint effort, with all Member States sharing the responsibility. The commitments undertaken by Member States to put in place and strengthen an efficient and operational Frontex must be respected. Without efficient external border controls, the Union will not be able to grant access to those refugees who need help. Effective external border controls are ultimately a precondition to maintain the Schengen System. Securing borders must not mean shutting out those who need protection for humanitarian reasons, according to the Geneva Convention.

We must be prepared to reach bold solutions that can safeguard our rights and protect our Union with no internal borders, allowing people to work, trade, study, and exchange ideas, goods and services freely. This is about defending our Europe, our Schengen and our social and fundamental rights.

The Committee therefore appeals to European and national civil society organisations to show their support, not only for maintaining but also for strengthening and enlarging the Schengen area. It commits, for its part, to make representations to the EU institutions, in particular the Council, to ensure that the Member States remain faithful to the principles of the treaties and agreements that clearly constitute positive achievements for the Union of the peoples of Europe.

Brussels, 17 February 2016.

*The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Georges DASSIS*

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