

Motion

Freedom of Movement for All: Bulgaria and Romania belong in the Schengen Area

signed by: Lithuanian Youth Council (LiJOT), Romanian National Youth Council (CTR), National Youth Forum of Bulgaria (NYF), Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ)

The Schengen area, one of the most significant accomplishments of the European Union, has revolutionised the movement of people within the region, eliminating internal border controls and making it easier for people to work, study, and experience different cultures across the European Union. The Schengen area has proven to be an essential element of the European integration process, and it should be safeguarded and extended to ensure the continued prosperity and sense of unity within the European Union.

On the 8th of December 2022, the Council of the European Union was deliberating the possibility of letting Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania join Schengen. Croatia was unanimously accepted, however, the application of Bulgaria and Romania was vetoed by the governments of Austria and the Netherlands.

Bulgaria and Romania have for years tried to fulfil the necessary requirements that were agreed upon previously for their attempt to join the Schengen area. When they finally managed to meet those goals, the response of the Council of the European Union was to deny them their rightful place in the Schengen area by virtue of two Member States vetoing their accession.

Considering that both countries have fulfilled the necessary criteria, the decision to withhold their acceptance into the Schengen area has a grave impact on the countries and the mobility of young people specifically. It is a given and considered to be a legitimate expectation of the people of Bulgaria and Romania to finally become part of Schengen after ten years of waiting and working tirelessly to finally be eligible to become part of the Schengen Agreement, and meeting every requirement of a Schengen area state, only to be let down inexplicably without a fair and objective reason. We believe that this sets a negative precedent where Member States may be discriminated against and negatively affected simply due to particularistic political decisions instead of making sure that the values of the European Union as a whole are upheld and maintained in practice.

In particular, we would like to draw attention to a demographic that is usually both not represented enough and not taken into account in the debate concerning the accession to the Schengen area of new Member States: the youth of the affected coun-

tries. The negative consequences of the status quo extend across multiple layers of the lives of young Europeans, having a long-term influence on their well-being and opportunities. The limited mobility of young people that stems from this decision is a primary negative effect. It continues to deprive the youth of valuable educational, professional, and cultural experiences, and can have a significant impact on their future prospects and overall quality of life. This impacts a variety of parties involved, such as young mobile workers, tourists, and public administrations, who depend on the principle of free movement inside the EU, one of the four freedoms and cornerstones of the Union. The current state of affairs means that the young people of these two countries are not able to access the same rights as other young people of other Member States that are already in the Schengen area. Additionally, the bureaucratic obstacles and expenses act as a deterrent to young people's participation in EU initiatives and programs and have a detrimental impact on the economies of Member States and the operation of the internal market of the European Union.

Blocking the Bulgarian and Romanian application sends an extremely dangerous and negative message to the governments and, most importantly, the citizens and inhabitants of the countries in question: one country may fulfil the required criteria or goals, yet be ignored and receive no proportional and adequate treatment. This can lead to an increase in eurosceptic tendencies, undermining the credibility of the EU and eroding the trust of young citizens in European institutions. Furthermore, it might dissuade other countries from pursuing European integration, threatening the stability and unity of the region. In particular, we emphasise and underline that these kinds of decisions weigh on the shoulders of the youth and disincentivise their activism and active involvement in civic society.

The Member Organisations of the European Youth Forum, namely the National Youth Councils and the International Non-Governmental Youth Organizations, express their support for the Bulgarian and Romanian civic society, young people, youth organisations and everyone else involved in their path to the Schengen area, and call for:

- The Justice and Home Affairs Council within the Council of the European Union to take all required measures to adopt

the decision regarding the complete application of the Schengen *acquis* regulations to the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania;

- The future trio of Presidencies of the Council of the European Union, comprising Spain, Belgium and Hungary, to formally support the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to Schengen area, by prioritising the Agenda within their Presidency and ensuring the adequate space for negotiations;
- The Member States to initiate a broad discussion and consultations to explore how the mechanism on making decisions concerning applications for the Schengen area could be further improved in the near future, based on the core values of the European Union and focused on the importance of the fulfilment of specific criteria and clearly defined procedures.



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