Press release | 07.06.2012

Border controls and Schengen

EU ministers take hatchet to core EU border-free policy

EU home affairs ministers today decided their position on two key legislative proposals concerning the EU's border-free Schengen system. The Greens hit out at the decisions, which would undermine the essence of Schengen by making the reimposition of border controls and evaluation of Schengen a national, rather than EU-level competence. Ministers also endorsed controversial proposals to allow member states to exclude their neighbours from Schengen. In addition, they decided to change the legal base of the proposals on Schengen evaluation to exclude the European Parliament from the process. Commenting on the outcome, Greens/EFA co-president **Dany Cohn-Bendit** said:

“Home affairs ministers have today taken a hatchet to Schengen. The EU's border free system has been an overwhelming success and one of the most positive concrete EU achievements, yet populist EU governments seem hell-bent on stripping it of its essence.

"The Schengen border-free system is trans-national in its conception and purpose; it is therefore both logical and essential that any decision to temporarily reintroduce border controls be subject to EU-level approval and not left up to the narrow-minded, national whims of individual member states. Regrettably, EU home affairs ministers have voted to overturn proposals to this end from the European Commission. They also overturned a separate proposal from the Commission to ensure that the evaluation of the application of Schengen in its member countries is carried out at EU-level."

Greens/EFA co-president **Rebecca Harms** added:

"Scandalously, the Council agreed on a proposal to change the legal base for the rules on the evaluation of Schengen, with a view to excluding the European Parliament from the process. Not only is it completely unacceptable to change the rules of the game after it has already kicked off, this decision is inconsistent with the treaties and we will push for the European Parliament to legally challenge it.

"To round off their hatchet job, the ministers supported proposals to suspend countries from Schengen based on the will of neighbouring Schengen members and a Council decision. This is no more than knee-jerk populism. A common border system implies pooling efforts to manage external borders. Penalising countries not fulfilling their obligations under Schengen should be a last resort and it is a decision that should be taken by the Commission and not left to national rivalries.

"Next week, the European Parliament civil liberties committee will vote to set out its position on these two files,

which are crucial to the very essence of Schengen. The Greens will continue to push to ensure the Commission's proposals win out."

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Rebecca Harms

Member

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