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Germany and France will block the extension of the Schengen zone to Bulgaria and Romania

On 21 December a letter from the interior ministers of Germany and France, respectively Thomas de Maiziere and Brice Hortefeux, to the European Commission was revealed. In the letter the two politicians reproach Bulgaria and Romania for insufficient progress in fighting corruption and organised crime. Germany and France's sceptical position will delay the extension of the Schengen zone, scheduled for March 2011.

As early as in September 2010 France's secretary of state for European affairs, Pierre Lellouche, pointed out that Bulgaria and Romania should not join the Schengen zone before the implementation of the EU Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) in the two countries in the area of the reform of the judicial system, fight with corruption and organised crime is judged as positive. Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed her scepticism towards the extension of the Schengen zone on her visit to Bulgaria and Romania in October 2010. She made Germany's consent conditional on the progress made by the two countries in implementing the CVM. In their letter, the interior ministers of Germany and France deem the extension of the Schengen zone to Bulgaria and Romania planned for spring 2011 premature. By making this extension dependent on the degree to which the CMV is implemented France and Germany go beyond the technical criteria of entering the Schengen zone (fulfilled by the two countries). Romania's president, Traian Basescu declared that combining the CVM and the Schengen *acquis* was discriminatory.

Germany's position is not surprising when widespread fears are taken into account that the opening up of the borders may result in an illegal influx of Bulgarian and Romanian citizens to the German labour market, officially closed to them until 2013. Maintaining border controls is important for Germany partly because of the high priority it gives to internal security and the sustained threat of terrorist attacks. It is very likely that the Schengen zone will not be extended in March 2011 as this decision has to be taken unanimously by all the states that belong to it. Therefore the issue of extending the Schengen zone to Bulgaria and Romania will be further negotiated. Another vote on the extension of the Schengen zone will probably be held during the evaluation of the functioning of the CVM in autumn 2011. <zawil>