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COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
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To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
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Delegations will find attached document COM(2024) 174 final.

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2024/0094 (NLE)

Proposal for a
COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION
for the 2024/2025 Schengen Cycle

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL

- **Reasons for and objectives of the proposal**

Despite its solid foundations, the Schengen area without controls at internal borders (“the Schengen area”) remains exposed to challenges that are not confined to the territory of one single Member State. In 2023, the Schengen area continued to be confronted with several pressing vulnerabilities at both national and European levels in core areas of the Schengen system that require an effective joint response.

Efforts made over the past years to reinforce the governance framework have laid the foundation for coordinated action between Member States and at Union level. The 2024 State of Schengen report demonstrates the Commission’s continued commitment to strengthening the governance of the Schengen area. The report, initiating the 2024-2025 Schengen cycle, serves as an essential resource for political decision-making and operational follow-up at both European and national levels. Building on Schengen evaluations conducted in 2023, the report provides an overview of the Schengen area's current state, assessing progress at the conclusion of the yearly governance cycle and pinpointing priority areas that require further attention.

Ensuring the proper functioning of the area without controls at internal borders between the Member States is a joint endeavour and shared responsibility that requires a coherent and coordinated approach. While the governance of the Schengen area has been reinforced with the launch of the first Schengen cycle in 2022, it still lacks a framework to identify and implement priorities based on common ownership and collective responsibility of all Member States. The result is often limited coordination and a frequent lack of joint implementation of the Schengen rules, leading to unilateral action and fragmented measures. The lack of this structured framework diminishes the capacity of the annual Schengen cycle to preserve and strengthen the integrity of the Schengen area.

In line with the way forward announced in the 2023 State of Schengen report, the 2024 report is therefore accompanied by a Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation. The aim of the present proposal for a Council Recommendation is to focus on a select number of issues, requiring Member States to act individually as well as collectively within the remit of the Schengen Council, in line with the existing policy initiatives on Schengen matters. Based on the priorities identified in the 2024 State of Schengen Report, the Commission proposes that the Council Recommendation focuses on:

- Consolidating the Schengen governance framework;
- Enhancing the preparedness, security, and resilience of the external borders;
- Accelerating the digitalisation of the Schengen area;
- Intensifying measures against cross-border crime and unauthorised movements; and
- Contributing to establishing an effective EU system for return.

This Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Schengen area is intended to serve as input for the upcoming Schengen Council meeting on 13/14 June 2024, during which the Council is expected to agree on the priorities for the upcoming 2024/2025 Schengen cycle. The implementation of this Recommendation should be monitored by the Council, with Member States, the Commission and relevant JHA Agencies regularly reporting on specific workstreams. The results of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring activities will be embedded in this process.

- **Consistency with existing policy provisions in the policy area**

This Recommendation seeks to step up the effective implementation of the Schengen *acquis* in a coordinated manner.

- **Consistency with other Union policies**

This Recommendation seeks to make a positive contribution to a fully operational and resilient Schengen area, facilitating the unrestricted movement of over 425 million people. This recommendation is in line with other Union policies, including those regarding security and migration, namely the Pact on Migration and Asylum and the Security Union Strategy.

2. LEGAL BASIS, SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORTIONALITY

- **Legal basis**

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and in particular points (a), (b), (d) and (e) of Article 77(2) and point (c) of Article 79(2) as well as Article 292, first and second sentence, thereof.

- **Subsidiarity (for non-exclusive competence)**

Article 292 TFEU enables the Council to adopt recommendations. According to this provision, the Council shall act on a proposal from the Commission in all cases where the Treaties provide that it shall adopt acts on a proposal from the Commission.

This applies in the current situation, as ensuring a coordinated approach to common priorities having an impact on the functioning of the Schengen area cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States acting alone and can be better achieved at the level of the Union.

- **Proportionality**

This proposal aims at ensuring the adoption of coordinated measures to avoid an inconsistent and fragmented implementation of the Schengen-wide priorities. The proposal does not go beyond what is necessary and proportionate for achieving the intended objectives.

- **Choice of the instrument**

n.a.

3. RESULTS OF EX-POST EVALUATIONS, STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

- **Ex-post evaluations/fitness checks of existing legislation**

n.a.

- **Stakeholder consultations**

n.a.

- **Collection and use of expertise**

n.a.

- **Impact assessment**

n.a.

- **Regulatory fitness and simplification**

n.a.

4. BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS

The proposal will not generate new funding requirements and will support an effective implementation of EU funds, by ensuring a strategic prioritisation at EU and national levels.

5. OTHER ELEMENTS

- **Implementation plans and monitoring, evaluation and reporting arrangements**

The implementation of the proposed Recommendation requires a close monitoring by the Council and the Commission, which will form a key part of 2024-2025 Schengen Cycle. In December 2024, the Council should take stock of the progress made and the Commission should report on the level of implementation of the Recommendation in the 2025 State of Schengen report.

Proposal for a

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

for the 2024/2025 Schengen Cycle

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Articles 77(2) and 79(2)(c) in conjunction with Article 292, first and second sentences thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the European Commission,

Whereas:

- (1) The creation of the Schengen area without controls at the internal borders (“Schengen area”) is one of the main achievements of the Union. A well-functioning Schengen area is a common objective that relies on the effective and efficient application of the Schengen *acquis*, a robust governance framework and a high level of mutual trust.
- (2) Since 2022, the Commission assesses the state of the Schengen area in its annual State of Schengen report. Launching the 2024-2025 Schengen cycle, the Commission adopted the 2024 State of Schengen report on 16 April 2024, identifying priorities requiring political and operational follow-up within the Schengen Cycle.
- (3) Building on the progress made in 2023 to consolidate Schengen governance, this framework needs to be reinforced to improve the setting and follow-up of the common priorities for the Schengen area through increased political ownership of all Member States and responsibility at EU level. To achieve this objective, it is appropriate to set and implement annual Schengen-wide priorities that will support Member States, complementing their individual efforts with coordinated and common action through the Schengen Council, and will also facilitate a close monitoring of the progress made to ensure a high level of implementation of the Schengen rules.
- (4) Taking into account the Commission’s assessment in the State of Schengen report and in light of the urgent action needed in some areas, it is considered opportune to focus coordinated action on: finalising the consolidation of Schengen governance; strengthening actions to enhance the preparedness of the Schengen area with more resilient external borders, ensuring full compliance with the obligations set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; finalising the digitalisation of the Schengen architecture to boost Europe’s competitiveness while ensuring high security standards for the citizens of the Union; stepping up collective responses to address more effectively common migration and security risks, including through increased police cooperation and a more effective and sustainable EU return system.

- (5) Solid national governance structures and processes in Member States supporting the effective implementation of national integrated border management and security strategies are a prerequisite for effective Schengen governance. National and European response capacities need to be strengthened and further developed to address irregular migration and secondary movements more effectively. Further efforts are also needed to combat cross-border crime and security threats in a more integrated manner.
- (6) Border control at the external borders is in the interest not only of the Member State at whose external borders it is carried out but for the Schengen area as a whole. The full operationalisation of the European Border and Coast Guard is a priority for the Union. Therefore, the standing corps and capabilities for the European Border and Coast Guard should be swiftly completed reaching 8 000 standing corps by 2025 in view of achieving the required objective of 10 000 standing corps by 2027. Furthermore, existing shortcomings in human resources as well as in technical equipment, both at Union and national levels, have to be urgently addressed. Member States need to guarantee an effective implementation of the national capability plans, which need to be updated in line with the recently adopted ‘EBCG Capability Roadmap’ to reflect the possible evolution of the situation at the external borders and related challenges.
- (7) Schengen evaluations have identified vulnerabilities in the use of databases, in particular the Schengen and Visa Information Systems, which constitute an important security gap. Failures in document checks and verification of identity lead to undetected threats and flawed procedures. This applies to visa applications, checks at external borders, return of third-country nationals with no legal right to stay, law enforcement actions, and more generally registration with the authorities of Member States. Efforts are needed to ensure that the relevant data is inserted in the databases, in line with the existing requirements, and to improve capabilities and processes to make full use of the available data, in particular to effectively identify and verify persons and their documents. The implementation of the Interoperability Architecture will also help combat identity fraud.
- (8) The effective implementation of the Regulation (EU) No .../... [Screening Regulation] requires Member States to take immediate steps to ensure that all capabilities and processes are effectively in place by 2025. To this end, they should progressively start allocating appropriate staff, sufficient resources, including for the independent monitoring body of fundamental rights, as well as adequate infrastructure.
- (9) Reinforcing the stability in the EU's neighbourhood and beyond contributes to the EU's own security. Therefore, cooperation to address irregular migration and combat cross-border crime, including migrant smuggling, should be stepped up with key countries along irregular migration routes. Among others, the Union needs to swiftly conclude the necessary status agreements, notably with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, that allow for deployments of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (“Frontex”) border guards with executive powers. Moreover, Frontex should agree on working arrangements with key partner countries, including in West Africa (Senegal and Mauritania), the Western Balkans (updates of current working arrangements), and with Eastern Partnership countries such as Armenia.
- (10) European and national immigration and security liaison officers deployed in third countries are essential to improve the intelligence picture of the Schengen area on current threats. Member States, however, are not effectively using the intelligence

offered by these liaison officers to the fullest as the collection of information is fragmented and incomplete. It is, therefore, necessary to maximise liaison officers' contribution to address the EU priorities and needs, by mapping and strategically optimising their deployments, mandates and reporting requirements. These efforts include making a more targeted use of airport liaison officers carrying out essential tasks to detect irregular migration and supporting enforcement activities. Furthermore, the networks of various liaison officers in third countries should be reinforced under the coordinating role of the EU delegations. This will close intelligence gaps and pool the currently dispersed strategic and operational awareness, leading to appropriate preparedness and to effective decision-making for border management, migration and security.

- (11) EUROSUR is the central framework for exchange of information and operational cooperation used for detecting, preventing, and combating irregular immigration and cross-border crime. It is essential that all Member States step up their contribution to EUROSUR, including as regards cross-border crime, to improve the national and European situational awareness and the EU's ability to react at the external borders. As regards the pre-frontier area¹, the collection and exchange of information with Frontex, between Member States and, where relevant, with partner countries needs to be strengthened with the use of specific situational pictures within the EUROSUR framework. To ensure smooth cooperation guaranteeing correct and regular provision of information with third countries' authorities, the EUROSUR model should be promoted in partner countries by both Member States and Frontex.
- (12) The timely launch of the Entry-Exit System (EES) in autumn 2024 and of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) in the first half of 2025 will strengthen the external borders and reinforce our internal security. In this context, all border crossing points need to be fully prepared and equipped, while procedures need to fully utilise the possibilities for automation to ensure fast and efficient processing of travel flows. Once the new systems, as well as their interoperability, are in operation, Member States, the Commission, and eu-LISA will monitor their effective implementation, in particular through the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism.
- (13) The efforts for the digital transformation of the Schengen area should be seen together with the Commission's upcoming initiative on the digitalisation of travel documents and facilitation of travel, as announced in the Schengen Strategy of 2021². This initiative will allow the Union to shape future global standards for seamless and secure travelling by introducing a uniform standard for digital travel documents.
- (14) In an area without internal border controls, citizens should be able to move swiftly and in security between Member States. Building on the important progress made toward this goal by Member States with the support of the Schengen Coordinator, it is now necessary to fully exploit the new possibilities included in the [revised Schengen Borders Code] and to maximise the measures contained in the Commission

¹ In accordance with Article 2(13) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, the 'pre-frontier area' means the geographical area beyond the external borders which is relevant for managing the external borders through risk analysis and situational awareness.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, 'A strategy towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area', 2 June 2021, COM (2021) 277 final.

Recommendation on cooperation between the Member States with regard to serious threats to internal security and public policy in the area without internal border controls³. In this context, throughout the Schengen area, regional initiatives need to be established following a whole-of-route approach, so that Member States facing related challenges agree and implement joint measures to address cross-border crime and secondary movements more effectively. For these regional initiatives to be successful, all Member States should give full effect to the recommendations laid down in the Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/915 on operational law enforcement cooperation⁴ and to the provisions of Directive (EU) 2023/977 on the exchange of information between the law enforcement authorities of Member States⁵ following the expiry of the deadline for its transposition on 12 December 2024.

- (15) Important efforts have been made in 2023 to improve the effectiveness of return with an increase of more than 15% in the number of effective returns, although progress varies among Member States and the overall number of returns remains low. Currently, the Schengen Information System contains around 300 000 return alerts corresponding to return decisions that have not been suspended and are, therefore, enforceable, the majority of which have been issued by Member States in 2023. In 2023, the Commission and Member States have redoubled their efforts to explore and fully exploit all available options to foster more mutual recognition of return decisions, based on the Commission's Recommendation of March 2023⁶ and facilitated by the new return alerts in the Schengen Information System.
- (16) As part of the country specific recommendations stemming from Schengen evaluations, several Member States were recommended to improve coordination and limit fragmentation of strategic and operational processes at national level as well as to fully exploit EU tools for more efficient returns. To ensure complementarity of action and a holistic approach, the EU Return Coordinator developed a 'Return Roadmap' with targeted actions, which is currently being implemented with the support of Frontex and Member States through the High-Level Network for Return. In line with the operational strategy for more effective returns⁷, it is necessary to put in place a more predictable and common strategic planning of returns under Frontex's lead.
- (17) In the implementation of this Recommendation, the Member States and Agencies concerned must ensure full compliance with the applicable rules on the protection of personal data. In particular, they must ensure that the increased exchange of information by law enforcement and judicial authorities, including personal data, is carried out in full respect of the data protection requirements and mandates of respective authorities. The authorities managing and using large-scale IT systems must ensure that data protection requirements are respected in practice and that compliance is regularly monitored.
- (18) Support at Union level is available for the implementation of this Recommendation including through the available Union Home Affairs Funds, namely the Border

³ C (2023) 8139 final.

⁴ OJ L 158, 13.6.2022, p. 53–64.

⁵ OJ L 134, 22.5.2023, p. 1–24.

⁶ C (2023) 1763 final of 16.3.2023.

⁷ COM (2023) 45 final.

Management and Visa Policy Instrument⁸, the Internal Security Fund⁹, and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund¹⁰, as well as research and innovation funding through the EU Framework Programme for Research Horizon Europe¹¹. For the remaining implementation period of these funds, including on the occasion of the upcoming mid-term review of the Home Affairs Funds, Member States should prioritise the use of the allocated amounts for addressing the proposed actions in this Recommendation. Furthermore, additional financial needs will be assessed in light of the evolving circumstances. Operational support to Member States is also available through the relevant JHA Agencies.

- (19) The implementation of this Recommendation should be monitored by the Council, with Member States, the Commission and relevant JHA Agencies regularly reporting on specific workstreams. The results of and follow-up to the Schengen evaluation activities will be embedded in this process.
- (20) In accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of Protocol No 22 on the Position of Denmark annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the TFEU, Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of this Recommendation and is not subject to its application. Given that this Recommendation builds upon the Schengen *acquis*, Denmark shall, in accordance with Article 4 of the said Protocol, decide within a period of six months after the Council has decided on this Recommendation whether it will implement it.
- (21) This Recommendation does not constitute a development of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in which Ireland takes part in accordance with Council Decision 2002/192/EC¹². Ireland is therefore not taking part in its adoption or subject to its application.
- (22) As regards Cyprus, point 4 of this Recommendation constitutes a development of the Schengen *acquis* within the meaning of Article 3(2) of the 2003 Act of Accession.
- (23) As regards Iceland and Norway, this Recommendation constitutes a development of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* within the meaning of the Agreement concluded by the Council of the European Union and the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway concerning the latter's association with the implementation, application and

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing, as part of the Integrated Border Management Fund, the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (OJ L 251, 15.7.2021, p. 48–93) .

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2021/1149 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Internal Security Fund (OJ L 251, 15.7.2021, p. 94–131) .

¹⁰ Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (OJ L 251, 15.7.2021, p. 1–47) .

¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/695 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing Horizon Europe – the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, laying down its rules for participation and dissemination, and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1290/2013 and (EU) No 1291/2013 (OJ L 170, 12.5.2021, p. 1–68) .

¹² Council Decision 2002/192/EC of 28 February 2002 concerning Ireland's request to take part in some of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* (OJ L 64, 7.3.2002, p. 20) .

development of the Schengen *acquis*¹³ which fall within the area referred to in Article 1 of Council Decision 1999/437/EC¹⁴.

- (24) As regards Switzerland, this Recommendation constitutes a development of the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* within the meaning of the Agreement between the European Union, the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis*¹⁵ which fall within the area referred to in Article 1 of Decision 1999/437/EC read in conjunction with Article 3 of Council Decision 2008/146/EC¹⁶.
- (25) As regards Liechtenstein, this Recommendation constitutes a development of provisions of the Schengen *acquis* within the meaning of the Protocol between the European Union, the European Community, the Swiss Confederation and the Principality of Liechtenstein on the accession of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the Agreement between the European Union, the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis*¹⁷ which fall within the area referred to in Article 1 of Decision 1999/437/EC read in conjunction with Article 3 of Decision 2011/350/EU¹⁸,

HEREBY RECOMMENDS:

Member States, acting individually, including through the implementation of recommendations adopted pursuant to evaluations carried out under Regulation (EU) 2022/922, and collectively within the Schengen Council, in 2024-2025:

1. Consolidate the **Schengen governance framework** to foster a higher level of implementation of common priorities and the Schengen architecture and contribute to the completion of the Schengen area, by
 - (a) Reinforcing the follow-up process to the Schengen Council meetings by agreeing on common lines of action in line with the State of Schengen report

¹³ OJ L 176, 10.7.1999, p. 36.

¹⁴ Council Decision 1999/437/EC of 17 May 1999 on certain arrangements for the application of the Agreement concluded by the Council of the European Union and the Republic of Iceland and the Kingdom of Norway concerning the association of those two States with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis* (OJ L 176, 10.7.1999, p. 31) .

¹⁵ OJ L 53, 27.2.2008, p. 52.

¹⁶ Council Decision 2008/146/EC of 28 January 2008 on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Community, of the Agreement between the European Union, the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis* (OJ L 53, 27.2.2008, p. 1) .

¹⁷ OJ L 160, 18.6.2011, p. 21.

¹⁸ Council Decision 2011/350/EU of 7 March 2011 on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Protocol between the European Union, the European Community, the Swiss Confederation and the Principality of Liechtenstein on the accession of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the Agreement between the European Union, the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen *acquis*, relating to the abolition of checks at internal borders and movement of persons (OJ L 160, 18.6.2011, p. 19) .

adopted by the Commission and incorporating regular monitoring and reporting through the Schengen Barometer+ and the Schengen Scoreboard.

- (b) Engaging with the Schengen Coordinator to support the implementation of remedial actions stemming from the Schengen evaluations, by making a more effective use of the Schengen Scoreboard, including through the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.
 - (c) Establishing national governance structures and processes, coordinated by senior officials with strategic responsibility for Schengen, and supporting the effective implementation of European Integrated Border Management and security strategies.
 - (d) Ensuring the careful monitoring and, where applicable, the timely adoption of decisions, in cases where, following the completion of a first-time Schengen evaluation, it is established that the necessary conditions for the application of the relevant parts of the Schengen *acquis* have been met, and in particular to take a final decision and establish an appropriate date for the lifting of the controls at the internal land borders of Bulgaria and Romania with other Member States.
2. Boost the preparedness, security, and resilience at the **external borders**, including through improved cooperation with third countries, by
- (a) Supporting the functioning of EU liaison officers that can operate under the umbrella of the EU delegations and provide strategic steer and coordination, thereby leveraging the intelligence provided by European and national immigration and security liaison officers.
 - (b) Increasing operational presence in priority third countries, including through airport liaison officers, by concluding the necessary agreements and arrangements or partnerships to better manage borders, migration, return, and security threats, ensuring respect of fundamental rights obligations.
 - (c) Enhancing cooperation with third countries on the exchange of information via EUROSUR by concluding bilateral and multilateral agreements with priority third countries to combat more effectively migrant smuggling and cross-border crime, as well as to prevent irregular migration and secondary movements.
 - (d) Remedying the limitations on the effectiveness of European Border and Coast Guard, in particular those related to the national capabilities in line with the new Capability Roadmap and those concerning the timely roll-out of the standing corps to achieve 8 000 officers by 2025 and 10 000 by 2027, by proactively implementing the measures identified in the evaluation of the EBCG Regulation¹⁹.
 - (e) Allocating sufficient resources and capabilities for border and return processes, including the independent monitoring mechanism, to ensure the effective implementation of the revised legislation, in particular the Regulation (EU) No

¹⁹ In particular measures 17-19 and 32-25 of SWD (2024) 75 final (Annex to COM/2024/75 final) .

.../... [Screening Regulation], Regulation (EU) No .../... [the Schengen Borders Code] and the Regulation (EU) No .../... [Crisis Regulation].

3. Consolidate the **digitalisation** of procedures and systems to increase security and efficiency at the EU's external borders and within the area without internal border controls, as well as intelligence-based decision-making, by
 - (a) Improving the exchange of real-time information between authorities at national level and with authorities across the EU, as well as using the interoperability tools to their full potential, to ensure that all necessary checks are effectively carried out.
 - (b) Allocating the necessary resources to maximise the effective use of the EU information systems for borders, migration and security to support visa processing, border checks, and the effective return of third-country nationals.
 - (c) Ensuring that the equipment, processes and systems are in place to allow for the timely and effective roll out of the Entry/Exit System and ETIAS and launching information campaigns to raise awareness of the new procedures among travellers and relevant stakeholders.
4. Ensure the smooth functioning of the Schengen area without controls at the internal borders by stepping up the fight against **cross-border crime** in line with the Council Recommendation on operational law enforcement cooperation²⁰ and the Commission Recommendation from November 2023²¹, by
 - (a) Establishing regional cooperation initiatives applying the whole-of-route approach to increase joint measures based on a common planning established through joint risk analysis.
 - (b) Supporting the commitments and strands of work identified under the framework of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling to strengthen the fight against migrant smuggling networks with key partners along irregular migration routes, including the digital smuggling phenomenon.
 - (c) Establish comprehensive risk analysis on cross border crime and enhance situational awareness by connecting the intelligence and information at the external borders and within the Schengen area in one (national) situational picture, as well as by developing the cooperation and exchange of information between the reinforced Single Points of Contact, with the National Coordination Centres, and Police and Customs Cooperation Centres in all Member States through the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA).
 - (d) Phasing out the long-lasting controls carried out at internal border sections, in line with the new strengthened framework provided for in the revised Schengen Borders Code.

²⁰ Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/915 of 9 June 2022 on operational law enforcement cooperation (OJ L 158, 13.6.2022, p. 53–64) .

²¹ C (2023) 8139 final.

5. Contribute to a more effective functioning of the **common EU system for return** based on better integrated cooperation among Member States, by
- (a) Taking steps to ensure that a return decision or relevant parts thereof can be shared upon a Member State request for supplementary information following an alert on return in the Schengen Information System, notably for the purpose of facilitating mutual recognition, assessing the risk of absconding and identifying third-country nationals, including those posing a security threat.
 - (b) Actively increasing and encouraging voluntary returns through a continued implementation of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration strategy, particularly by setting up dedicated structures for return counselling and EU streamlined reintegration support with a view to fostering ownership of the returnee and supporting third countries to develop institutional, policy, and operational frameworks and structures to ensure ownership and sustainability of the return and readmission process.
 - (c) Contributing to the targeted actions under the ‘Return Roadmap’, including through actively supporting Frontex in setting up a predictable coordination system, based on joint planning of Member States’ use of Frontex support to allow better pooling of resources during all phases of return, including a more strategic use of Frontex return operations, particularly to priority third countries in line with EU policy, and increase voluntary returns.
 - (d) Proactively contributing through the High-Level Network for Returns to the work of the EU Return Coordinator in establishing a Schengen model for effective returns, including the development of effective performance indicators and by swiftly implementing recommendations stemming from the 2024 Schengen thematic evaluation on returns.

Done at Brussels,

*For the Council
The President*