



The EU has "broken promises" to Bulgaria and Romania, according to Poland (Photo: Council of European Union)

Bulgaria and Romania's Schengen bid vetoed

22.09.11 17:44

BY VALENTINA POP

The Netherlands and Finland on Thursday (22 September) vetoed Romania and Bulgaria's bid to join the border-free Schengen area, a move the Polish EU presidency said represented a "sad conclusion about mutual trust among member states."

"Mutual trust means keeping promises as well. Today that promise has been broken," Polish interior minister Jerzy Miller told reporters after the meeting. He said both Bulgaria and Romania were told they would join Schengen once they met the criteria and that the latest technical evaluations in April had confirmed they had done so.

"We live in difficult times for the EU. Such times require mutual support. And today we are not confident enough to say we want to act together," he said.

Miller also noted that both countries had already been given access to the Schengen information system (SIS) which records cross-border criminal suspects and stolen vehicles. "We are using their assistance, but not accepting them in our family, this is not what solidarity is about," Miller said.

But both the Finnish and Dutch interior ministers argued that the two countries had not done enough to fight corruption and organised crime and could not yet be trusted with guarding the borders of the 25-member-strong area.

"At a time when we are asked for financial solidarity, we need the trust of our citizens. You can only make that work when you show that rules are respected," Dutch minister Gerd Leers told reporters after the meeting.

Responding to the argument that the two countries are technically ready, Leers said: "You can have a door locked and fitted with the latest systems, but if the guard is not trustworthy, it's no use."

A Franco-German compromise allowing the two countries to join this autumn with their airports and sea ports and have their land borders lifted later on was also unacceptable because the negotiating position would be weakened once a green light was given in principle for the two to join Schengen.

Both Finland and the Netherlands indicated they would revisit their position only after an EU commission assessment in February 2012 of how Romania and Bulgaria are tackling corruption and organised crime.

"In fact, Romania and Bulgaria got in the EU too early, that's why we have the commission's monitoring and that's why we are taking Schengen enlargement so seriously," Leers stressed.

But to the Romanian and Bulgarian ministers, the veto was seen as unfair and disappointing.

"We expected a favourable decision today about our accession. Nineteen countries were in favour of our accession and said that it's not normal to change the rules during the game," Romanian interior minister Traian Igas said.

The only way to unblock the situation is to have "dialogue" with the Hague and Helsinki, he stressed, adding that his country is willing to receive experts from the two countries to see how the Romanian borders are being managed.

As for the argument that the rule of law in Romania is too shaky to be trusted, Igas retorted that the largest foreign capital in his country comes from Dutch companies: "If Dutch businessmen are trusting enough to invest, it is unacceptable for the Dutch government to say those things."

He put the blame on anti-immigrant parties in the Netherlands and Finland and said that "we are obliged too much to involve isolated political groups, who hurt EU ideas."

Finnish interior minister Patvi Rasanen disagreed, however: "This has nothing to do with Finnish domestic politics or the Romanian Roma on the streets of Helsinki. They have to speed up the fight against corruption and reform their judiciary. We may go back to the issue in spring, after the commission's report."

<http://euobserver.com/22/113707>