

Finland eases position on Bulgarian and Romanian membership in Schengen

Finland would accept both countries under certain conditions

16.11.2011/

<http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Finland+eases+position+on+Bulgarian+and+Romanian+membership+in+Schengen/1135269873812>

The Finnish government has modified its previous position on the possible membership of Bulgaria and Romania in the Schengen treaty. Finland joined The Netherlands in September this year in opposing accession of the two countries into the Schengen zone. Now Finland is willing to let both countries join Schengen in two stages – in March and July next year – if certain conditions are met.

The conditions put forward by Finland are that Romania and Bulgaria must show that they have developed their legal systems, and that they have made efforts to prevent corruption and organised crime. Progress would be measured through the European Commission's Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM).

“Previously our starting point was that all borders would be opened at one go. Now we can consider a two-stage opening of borders if clear and sufficient progress has been made in the CVM reporting”, says Minister of the Interior **Päivi Räsänen** (Christ. Dem.) on Tuesday.

If the demands are implemented, sea and air borders could be opened in March and land borders could be opened in July.

“It is important for Finland that... these countries will finally implement what they have promised”, Räsänen emphasised. She also warned that Finland would not endorse the countries' Schengen membership in March if insufficient progress is made.

The main concern is the security of the two countries' borders with non-EU members.

According to government sources, Finland wants to prevent a situation in which victims of human trafficking can easily enter the countries, and in that way, to the rest of the Schengen zone.

The sources say that Finland wants to distance itself from The Netherlands, which categorically opposes the Schengen membership of Romania and Bulgaria for domestic political reasons. However, the continued opposition of the Dutch would keep Romania and Bulgaria out of Schengen, as the decision is one that requires consensus among the countries involved.

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Helsingin Sanomat