
AUSTRIA STICKING TO VETO ON SCHENGEN EXPANSION, FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS

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Austria will maintain its veto on the extension of the EU's passport-free Schengen zone to Bulgaria and Romania until Vienna sees a sustained decline in asylum seekers, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg said in an interview.

Asylum applications in Austria (not including Ukrainians) nearly tripled last year to about 110,000 – the highest per-capita rate in the EU – prompting the government to block the Schengen area's expansion in December.

What's important to us, to be perfectly frank, is that the numbers go down and there has to be a sustained decline, Schallenberg said, calling the veto a warning signal to Brussels. One must understand that when we're seeing over 100,000 asylum applications every 12 months, it is difficult for us as Austria to just let this dysfunctional system roll along.

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