Crossing at external borders of the States, Schengen cooperation. Annual reports 1998

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PURPOSE : To present an annual report on the situation at the External Borders of the States in which the Schengen Convention has been brought into force for the period 1 January 1998 to 31 December 1998. CONTENT : The report states that 1998 was marked by a substantial rise of migratory pressure at land and sea borders. It discusses: - The routes along which illegal immigration was particularly pronounced. - The main migratory flows originate in the Balkans, the entire region inhabited by ethnic Kurds, and the African continent, the main region being North Africa. - The places where migratory flows meet the Schengen external borders and where the focal points emerge. - Amongst the many land borders discussed, the cross-channel link between Belgium and the United Kingdom proved to be a flashpoint. This is the subject of continuing discussion between the authorities. Germany's eastern borders with Poland and the Czech Republic were the main border, which saw a large rise in unauthorised entry. The migratory pressures on airports did not increase significantly. With regard to maritime borders, pressures differ considerably between the northern and the southern external borders of the Schengen area. Spain, Greece and Italy are seeing a strong and continuing flow; The Apulian coast of Italy sees migration from Albania which is due exclusively to organised criminal gangs specialising in human smuggling. The Sicilian coast mainly involved people from North and Central Africa. It seems that criminal gangs now also run this flow. The measures taken to tackle the phenomenon and their effectiveness: Germany has reported the creation of Joint Smuggling Investigation Group by the Federal Border guard and the police forces of different federal states. German/Polish liaison posts have been set up at two border crossing points. Greece, Spain, Italy and Austria have all taken initiatives to control illegal immigration at land borders. With regard to flights, growing attention is being paid to measures taken in the country of origin, such as pre-boarding checks. On maritime borders, considerable improvement has occurred as a result of increasing financial means for human resources and high technology equipment. The most common problems encountered during border control implementation are discussed in the report. These include the functioning of the Schengen Information System, the issuing of visas in Member States' consulates, and false documents The Report concludes that significant efforts have been made through the increase of human resources and mutual assistance, but that greater co-operation is needed at European level.