

## Broadening the Borders

Expansion of the Schengen area would encourage free movement

**In 1985, the governments of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands signed a cooperative agreement in a small border town called Schengen that eliminated border checks among those countries. Taking the name of the Luxembourg town where the agreement was signed, the Schengen area lets participating countries' citizens travel freely without having to show a visa or passport. Schengen's goal is to ensure free movement of people, goods, services, labor and capital. From those beginnings 26 years ago, 25 countries, nearly all of the members of the European Union, have joined the Schengen area.**



Serbian travelers hand over their passports at the border with Hungary in December 2009. As of that month, Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro were allowed to travel visa-free across Europe.

But in building this passport-free zone, Europe has striven to protect external borders against organized crime, drugs, terrorism and illegal immigration. If a criminal or terrorist slips across one Schengen country's border, that country's mistake becomes everyone's mistake. The challenge for Europe is how to expand the Schengen zone in the spirit of welcoming immigrants and visitors, yet still maintain security.

In April 2010, the EU simplified entry into its passport-free zone with a revised visa policy. The Schengen visa policy overhaul reduces long lines, simplifies the completion of forms, cuts costs, institutes appeals for denials and reduces trips to consulates for visa applicants. Border simplification, such as Schengen, offers travel flexibility for tourists, journalists, students, families and medical patients. Border porosity also means a smoother flow of goods and labor, which provides huge benefits for countries suffering worker shortages as a result of declining birthrates.

To help EU countries attract highly skilled workers, officials initiated in 2008 an EU Blue Card immigration plan similar to the U.S. green card system. Cardholders would be treated as EU nationals regarding tax benefits, social assistance, payment of pensions, access to public housing and study grants. The EU hopes the Blue Card will help the countries compete for educated migrants, as Europe grows older and a shortage of skilled professionals results. A 2006 report by the Danish Institute for International Studies affirms that the expansion of the EU into new countries – countries that subsequently earn membership in Schengen – has been hugely successful.

“The main objective of the enlargement policy, however, has not been to increase the Union's political weight, but to extend the area of security beyond its borders, progressively including those countries seeking stability and economic prosperity,” the publication said. Before new EU members

# Schengen and EU Countries



## SCHENGEN BUT NOT EU STATE

- 1. Iceland
- 2. Norway
- 3. Switzerland

## NON-SCHENGEN BUT IN EU

- 4. Bulgaria
- 5. Cyprus
- 6. Ireland
- 7. Romania
- 8. United Kingdom

## BOTH EU AND SCHENGEN STATE

- 9. Austria
- 10. Belgium
- 11. Czech Republic
- 12. Denmark
- 13. Estonia
- 14. Finland
- 15. France
- 16. Germany
- 17. Greece
- 18. Hungary
- 19. Italy
- 20. Latvia
- 21. Lithuania
- 22. Luxembourg
- 23. Malta
- 24. Netherlands
- 25. Poland
- 26. Portugal
- 27. Slovakia
- 28. Slovenia
- 29. Spain
- 30. Sweden

join Schengen fully, they must prove they can police their borders effectively using computerized tracking systems.

### Making travel easier

The new streamlined Schengen visa process is “faster and fairer,” the European Commission announced in April 2010. The wait has been shortened to two weeks, during which time a country’s representative must interview the visa candidate. Visa denials must come with an explanation for the denial. In the old system, applicants never learned why they were rejected, breeding frustration. “I think we should admit that in the past sometimes the visa process was not always customer friendly. There were very long waiting lines; sometimes you had to wait for two months before you could apply for your visa,” Jan de Ceuster, head of the EC’s visa issuance department, told the Deutsche Welle in May 2010.

The waiting list grows for countries desiring visa-free travel, and Russia has been pressing for such status since at least 2005. At the last EU-Russia summit in May 2010, EU officials raised new demands of Russia, and it appears that visa-free travel between the two will not be anytime soon. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin vowed it would eventually happen, predicting “visa-free travel to football fans if Russia wins its bid to host the 2018 or 2022 World Cup,” *The Moscow Times* reported in September 2010. Russia was chosen in December 2010 to be the host of the 2018 tournament by world soccer body FIFA. This win may serve as a powerful incentive for Russia to complete Schengen requirements.

Some EU members are less optimistic. German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters in September 2010 that “there’s yet a long way to go.” Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė added that the EU had other priorities, namely Ukraine, and it was too early to talk about Russian membership. Various European government officials agree that a group of six former Soviet republics — Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine — should be allowed visa-free travel before Russia. George Schoepflin, an EU parliamentarian from Hungary, said it may be a burden for Russia to wait for Azerbaijan to catch up to Schengen border standards, but he hopes negotiations are completed by 2014.

### Visa precautions necessary

Some European officials worry that looser borders with Russia will attract crime and wonder whether the EU would be able to deport Russian citizens who overstay their visas. Growth in trade between Germany and Russia has sparked more interest in border crossing. In July 2010, Germany and Russia signed nearly two dozen deals between companies, including Siemens and Russian Railways, adding up to billions of dollars. “Germany is Russia’s major trading partner with trade between the two countries topping \$15 billion [more than 10 billion euros] in the first quarter of the year,” *The Associated Press* reported.

Economic cooperation and the visa-free regime were discussed at a meeting in July 2010 between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and German President Christian

# Immigration Dilemmas

Although troubles persist, Europe has made progress

Fewer job opportunities and stronger deterrence curbed the number of illegal immigrants crossing into the European Union by 33 percent in 2009, Frontex, the EU's border management agency, reported. Experts anticipate this number to rebound when the job market improves and new weak spots along borders are exposed.

The Frontex 2010 Annual Risk Analysis praised two bilateral agreements that helped control illegal immigrant crossings on the so-called Central Mediterranean route — Libya to Italy — and the Western African route — Senegal and Mauritania to Spain. In 2009, Libya and Italy signed an agreement for Libya to repatriate most of the migrants rescued in the Mediterranean. Malta has indirectly benefited from the agreement, and as of mid-year 2010, only a single group of 27 illegal immigrants had reached Malta, the *Times of Malta* reported. “Although the [European] Commission prefers a European rather than a bilateral agreement, this bilateral agreement between Italy and Libya had proved to be efficient because illegal migration had been stopped,” Stefano Manservigi, director general for development of the European Commission, told the *Times of Malta* in July 2010.

In 2007, Spain signed collaborative agreements with Senegal and Mauritania for a Spanish labor plan that offers legal passage and one-year work permits. The hope is that a legal migration option will dissuade young Africans from dangerous attempts to enter illegally. “It’s advanced thinking in terms of migration policy,” Peter Sutherland, the United Nations special representative for migration, said in an interview with *The New York Times* in 2007. “It’s trailblazing.”

## Border troubles remain

In contrast, Greece continues to struggle with border control and remains a choice route among those desiring entry into the EU. Border corruption persists in the Balkans. “Greece has found itself on the sharp end of Europe’s illegal-immigration problem largely because its ‘competitors’ have found ways of stemming the flow,” *The Economist* wrote in February 2010. Significant traffic into Greece pours across its 125-mile land border with Turkey. According to Frontex, 90 percent of Europe’s illegal immigrants enter through Greece. Determined to fight the unwanted flux, the Greek government announced in December 2010 that it plans to build a wall along its land border with Turkey to keep out unwanted migrants. In October 2010, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan promised closer cooperation with Greece to fight illegal immigration into Europe in exchange for Greek assistance in helping loosen visa rules for Turks, *The Associated Press* reported. Poorly monitored borders hurt the economy and security. In April 2010, a deputy commander of Tajikistan’s border guard troops was caught accepting a bribe of 10,600 euros, paid in dollars, and was additionally suspected of drug trafficking, the Russian news agency Ria Novosti reported. Heroin from Afghanistan flows partly through Tajikistan to

Russia and the rest of Europe. Britain recently strengthened its borders, making it more difficult for Afghan refugees to immigrate, after combating floods of refugees over the past decade.

## Spain embraces immigrants

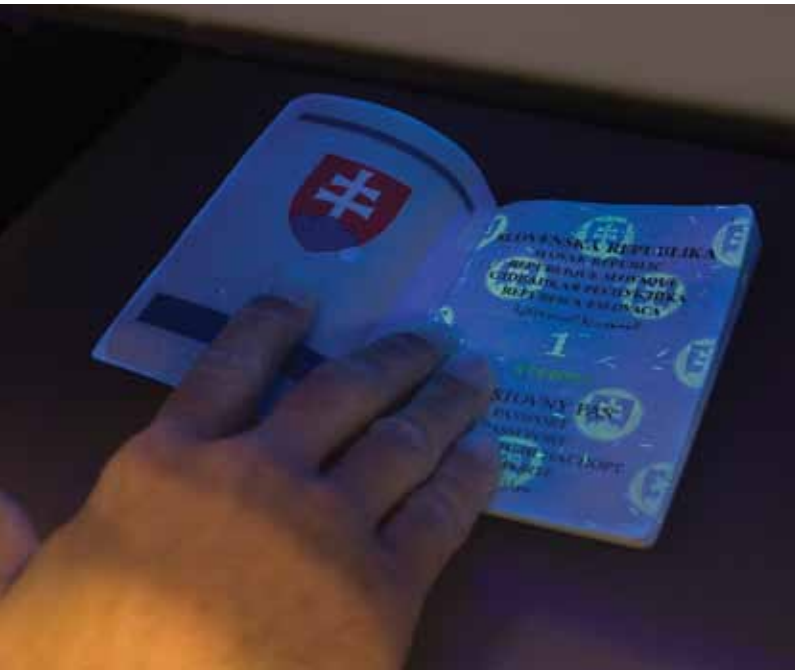
On the other hand, Spain has pioneered a more open immigration policy. Over the past decade, it has absorbed more than 3 million foreigners from Romania, Morocco and South America. “In 1999, Spain was a country with barely any immigrants at all. Today, they make up 12 percent of the population,” the *Guardian* reported in October 2010. Jobs are a big draw for immigrants. Many of the millions of jobs created in Spain over the past few years were in construction, the hospitality industry and health care.

However, not even Spain is immune to the worldwide economic crisis. Spain’s unemployment reached 19 percent in 2010, almost twice the EU average, with a record 4 million people out of work. Some economists say Spain’s approach to immigration, nonetheless, is a model for growth in Western Europe and elsewhere. “If you make your labor market more open and flexible, in a world where populations are more mobile and economies are globalizing, you attract people who want to work,” economist Eric Chaney told *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Turmoil in North Africa in the winter and spring of 2011 forced rulers there to disregard their once successful immigration policy with Italy. Thousands of North African refugees arrived in Italy, mostly from Libya. Before January 2011, Spain and Italy shared agreements with North African countries that hindered migrants from sailing the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. Italy would donate \$5 billion over 20 years if Libya blocked immigrants from leaving. A recent article by the European Union Institute for Security Studies suggests members step up diplomacy and work “towards a more harmonious European asylum and migration policy.”

## Attracting skilled immigrants

The numbers do not lie: EU economies would benefit from immigrant labor and purchasing power. “European countries where women have fewer than two children, on average, have to keep bringing in non-Europeans to maintain their populations, living standards, and pensions,” Andre Sapir, economics professor at the Universite Libre de Bruxelles, told *Bloomberg Businessweek*. Letting in educated workers with the use of an EU Blue Card may prove to be effective.

Different countries offer different approaches to illegal immigration, based on culture and international relations. Immigrants have made tremendous contributions to Europe. A statement made by Kofi Annan, former secretary-general of the United Nations, in a speech in 2004 still holds true: “An open Europe will be a fairer, richer, stronger, younger Europe — provided Europe manages immigration well.”



REUTERS

A Swiss customs officer checks a passport at a crossing near Geneva on the Swiss-French border. Switzerland joined the Schengen zone in December 2008.

Wulff. Wulff said he welcomes a visa-free proposal but that it should happen when all member states are ready. European leaders agree that removing visa requirements “is a reward for progress toward democracy and the rule of law and thus a powerful carrot in Europe’s relationship with Russia,” the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote in May 2010. Eager to boost tourism and ease their nation’s financial distress, Greek officials are also working with Russia to create a simplified visa regime between the two nations.

Bulgaria and Romania, despite belonging to the EU, have also met roadblocks in becoming Schengen members. In September 2010, EU European affairs ministers decided to delay the admission of those countries, citing the countries’ inadequate judicial systems and failure to curb corruption, according to the website EurActiv. The proposed admission in 2011 of Bulgaria and Romania is uncertain. An EU assistance program called the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism is helping those countries reach their Schengen goals.

A handful of other countries are also moving forward. Visa requirements for citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina were dropped in December 2010. To enter the Schengen area, Bosnians and Albanians require only biometric passports. This development came after they improved passport security and border control and fought organized crime and corruption. Countries on the waiting list for visa-free travel are Croatia, Kosovo, Georgia, Taiwan and Turkey.

### Lessons learned

Mixed emotions about Schengen enlargement exist. The visa-free regime of the EU can be rigid and exclude

countries outside the Union. This can stimulate the need for bilateral, separate agreements between EU members and non-EU members. One example of this is Poland, an EU member, and Ukraine, a non-member. The EU visa-free regime unintentionally undercut previously established social and economic ties between the former Warsaw Pact members.

Corruption and crime also find a way of entering the Schengen zone, and this can increase costs for all EU countries. Switzerland experienced a flood of beggars on streets, bridges, buses and trams. Swiss citizens complained of increased litter. Corrupt border guards and inconsistent application of asylum policies have been considerable problems.

Germany experienced an increased number of car thefts near the border, but also increased business from cross-border commerce. West European states, however, retain the right to block immigration at least for the next five years.

Some fear that border freedom means migrants will take their jobs. Sentiment against immigration appears to be rising in Europe, as witnessed in complaints about the proverbial Polish plumber “stealing” jobs and the success of anti-immigration parties in Sweden and the Netherlands. “There is little evidence,” said Vladimír Špidla, EU commissioner for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, “that workers from the new member states have displaced local workers or driven down their wages in a serious way, even in those countries where the inflows have been greatest, although there have been some temporary adjustment problems in specific areas.”

### Travel freedom reflects relationships

*The Economist* recently reported that British citizens enjoy the fewest visa restrictions of nearly 200 countries, with Denmark coming in second, and France, Germany and Italy tied for third. The article asserts that the number of visa restrictions that a country imposes on visitors from outside of the Schengen is an indicator of a country’s international alliances and relations. “Generally, citizens of rich countries and trade-based economies have more freedom to travel than those of countries suffering from war or repression.” Afghanistan, Iraq and North Korea impose the largest number of restrictions on their citizens’ travel, according to the article.

On the whole, although Schengen itself did not greatly change European immigration policy, it is an influential factor that continues to encourage harmonization on issues such as the management of visa policy, both legal and illegal immigration policy, asylum, as well as greater cooperation on security issues. “The aim of the new EU visa code is to coordinate the practices in all the Schengen countries, making it easier for the millions of applicants all over the world asking for a Schengen visa,” European Justice Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem told the *Deutsche Welle* in May 2010. Slowly becoming part of the EU promotes a more democratic way of life, assists countries to solve their problems and promotes neighborly cooperation. □