



EU rules on border controls

Summary: Twenty five countries in Europe have signed up to the Schengen Agreement. Citizens of the Schengen area are free to travel from one country to another without passport control or custom checks.

The first Schengen Agreement, named after the town in Luxembourg where it was signed, was signed in 1985 by five countries, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands who decided to create a territory without internal borders.

A further eight countries signed up in 1997 after the Schengen arrangements were incorporated into EU law in the Treaty of Amsterdam. These are Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Austria.

Of the 10 countries that joined the EU in 2004 nine are now members of the Schengen area: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

A number of non EU member states have also joined. Iceland and Norway, which with Sweden, Denmark and Finland, are members of the Nordic Passport Union, were accepted into Schengen arrangements in 2001. Switzerland joined in 2004.

The UK and Ireland, while not full members of Schengen, take part in some of the arrangements namely police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, the fight against drugs and in the Schengen Information System (SIS).

To match security with freedom, this freedom of movement was accompanied by improved co-operation and co-ordination between the police and judicial authorities of participating member states in order to safeguard internal security and to counter organised crime. A sophisticated database, the Schengen Information System, is used by the authorities to exchange data on certain categories of people and goods.

A more advanced version of the Schengen Information System, SIS II, is being developed that will provide new facilities for information sharing and co-operation among Schengen members.

For more on the Schengen area and information co-operation:

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/justice_freedom_security/free_movement_of_persons_asylum_immigration/l33020_en.htm

and for travel documents needed:

http://europa.eu/travel/doc/index_en.htm