

The Schengen Plan: Europe's border-free zone to breach former Iron Curtain

By [Global Research](#)

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European nations bring down the last remnants of the Iron Curtain on Friday when they form a vast free-movement zone embracing 24 countries from Spain to Estonia.

From the first moment of Friday 400 million Europeans will find travelling by road, rail and ship easier as internal border controls are scrapped with nine mostly eastern European EU members.

By March, travel document checks will be also abolished at airports in the nine as they join the 15 nations signed up to the Schengen Treaty, named after the Luxembourg border village where the no-frontiers pact was born in 1985.

"It is a visible sign that the former divisions in Europe, the borders on the ground and in people's minds, are being overcome," European Parliament President Hans-Gert Poettering told EU leaders at their summit last week.

"This will lead to greater freedom and security, not only for the citizens of the nine future Schengen countries, but also for the European Union as a whole," he said.

After two years of preparation, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia will join the oldest EU states — bar Britain and Ireland — plus Iceland and Norway in the zone.

Cyprus plans to sign up soon, as does Switzerland, while London and Dublin prefer to remain outside and keep their own visa regimes, rather than the one visa for all policy that applies to the Schengen countries.

To mark the occasion, seen as an early Christmas present at a peak travel time, European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso and Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini will take part in border ceremonies as the barriers come down.

Slovak premier Robert Fico and Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer will saw through a border post.

Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen will steam into Tallinn harbour in Estonia on a ferry, minus the usual travel formalities.

"We will live and circulate in an area of 24 countries without internal borders. This is a unique and historic accomplishment," Barroso said Tuesday.

“The lifting of the European Union’s internal borders brings opportunities for people living, circulating and doing business in Europe,” he said.

However those opportunities imply tightened security in other areas.

The new countries will be obliged to provide data to the Schengen Information System (SIS) so police and customs officers can access information about people, vehicles or goods.

Police and judicial cooperation has also been strengthened with the introduction of new rights allowing cross-border surveillance or the “hot pursuit” of suspects over frontiers.

All the controls can be re-established temporarily in case of emergency, for security reasons, or when people move en-masse, such as for sporting events.

Yet despite the advantages promoted by EU officials, like boosting tourism and fostering economic and cultural dynamism, the process is not without drawbacks.

The flip side of the new internal freedom is tightened security on Schengen’s new eastern reaches.

Slovenia will open its borders to Italy and Austria but its responsibilities to enforce Schengen’s new external frontier will oblige it to impose tougher controls on citizens who have long-crossed over from Croatia.

Ukrainians fear their easy access to the west will disappear with new rules demanding they produce return tickets, proof they can finance their stays and health insurance.

And the high-tech new frontier controls have failed to overcome fears, in Germany and Austria especially, that the Schengen zone’s expansion east will spark a made-in eastern Europe crime wave.

Ebersbach, a small town of 8,500 in former East Germany on the Czech border already looks set for an assault with barbed wire framing house windows and properties and resident having creating their own frontier security association.

Around 59 percent of former East Germans view Schengen’s expansion negatively with local media reporting a boom in house alarms and reinforced doors.

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