

The Schengen Information System - Cross border Information Exchange

The Beginning 1985

In 1985 France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands decided in the town of Schengen to create a territory without internal borders. This became known as the "Schengen area". This intergovernmental cooperation expanded to include 13 countries in 1997, following the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam. The Treaty of Amsterdam incorporated the decisions taken since 1985 by Schengen group members and the associated working structures into EU law on 1 May 1999.

Rapid growth

Little by little the Schengen area was extended to include almost every Member State. Italy signed the agreement on 27 November 1990, Spain and Portugal joined on 25 June 1991, Greece followed on 6 November 1992, then Austria on 28 April 1995 and finally Denmark, Finland and Sweden joined on 19 December 1996.

Not all EU Member States participate fully

Today, the Schengen area does not include all the Member States: Ireland and the United Kingdom currently only take part in some aspects of the Schengen cooperation, namely the Schengen Information System (SIS). Denmark has signed the Schengen agreement, but has reserved the right to choose whether or not to apply any new decisions taken under the agreements.

The New Member States

The 10 Member States that joined the EU in 2004 currently do not participate in the borderless Schengen area. The Schengen area will only be enlarged to these states, if they fully comply with all provisions of the so called Schengen *acquis*.

Development of the Schengen area

1995 entry into force

The Schengen agreements finally came into effect in 1995. They abolished the internal borders of the Signatory States and created a single external border. Common rules regarding visas, asylum rights and checks at external borders were adopted to allow the free movement of persons within the Signatory States without disturbing law and order.

Compensatory Measures

Further so-called "compensatory" measures were introduced: This involved improving coordination between the police, customs and the judiciary and taking necessary measures to combat important problems such as terrorism and organised crime. In order to make this possible, a complex information system known as the Schengen Information System (SIS) was set up to exchange data on people's identities and descriptions of objects which are either stolen or lost.

The Schengen *Acquis*

These measures, together with related decisions and declarations adopted by the EU Council, constitute the so called Schengen *acquis*.

A list of the elements which make up the *acquis*, setting out the corresponding legal basis for each in the treaties was first adopted in 1999. All these acts form part of the legal rules which countries seeking EU membership must adopt into their own national legislation.

From SIS to SIS II

Information exchange on persons and goods

The SIS is an automatic network set up to allow all police stations and consular agents from Schengen group Member States to access data on specific individuals, or vehicles and objects which are lost or stolen

Entries into the SIS can only be made by Member States. Entries may concern persons and goods provided precise entry criteria are fulfilled. Currently the SIS contains about 1 million entries in relation to persons.

Access to the SIS is currently restricted to border control and other police and customs authorities as defined by national law.

SIS Structure

Member States supply the network through national networks (N-SIS) which are connected to a central system located in Strasbourg, France, (C-SIS), and this is supplemented by a network known as SIRENE (**S**upplementary **I**nformation **R**equ^{est} at the **N**ational **E**ntry), made up of representatives from the national and local police, customs and the judiciary.

The second generation Schengen Information System ([SIS II](#))

Restrictions of SIS

At present the Schengen Information System operates in 13 Member States and two non-member States (Norway and Iceland). However, the system was not designed, and therefore lacks the capacity, to operate in as many Member States as there are in the Union after enlargement. It is therefore necessary to develop a new second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II). To enable the future Member States to use the system, and to take into account the latest developments in information technology, the Council adopted corresponding decisions as early as December 2001:

Latest steps

As a latest step in towards the development of the SIS II the EU Commission's Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs has signed a contract with a multinational team of IT companies. The contract signed by the European Commission for a global budget of up to 40 million Euros will ensure that, by the end of 2006 (VIS) and March 2007 (SIS II), the centrally run EU parts of the new SIS II and VIS information systems will be up and running.

SIS II a precondition for enlargement of the Schengen Area

The implementation of SIS II is an important precondition for the lifting of border controls between the former EU-15 and the new Member States.