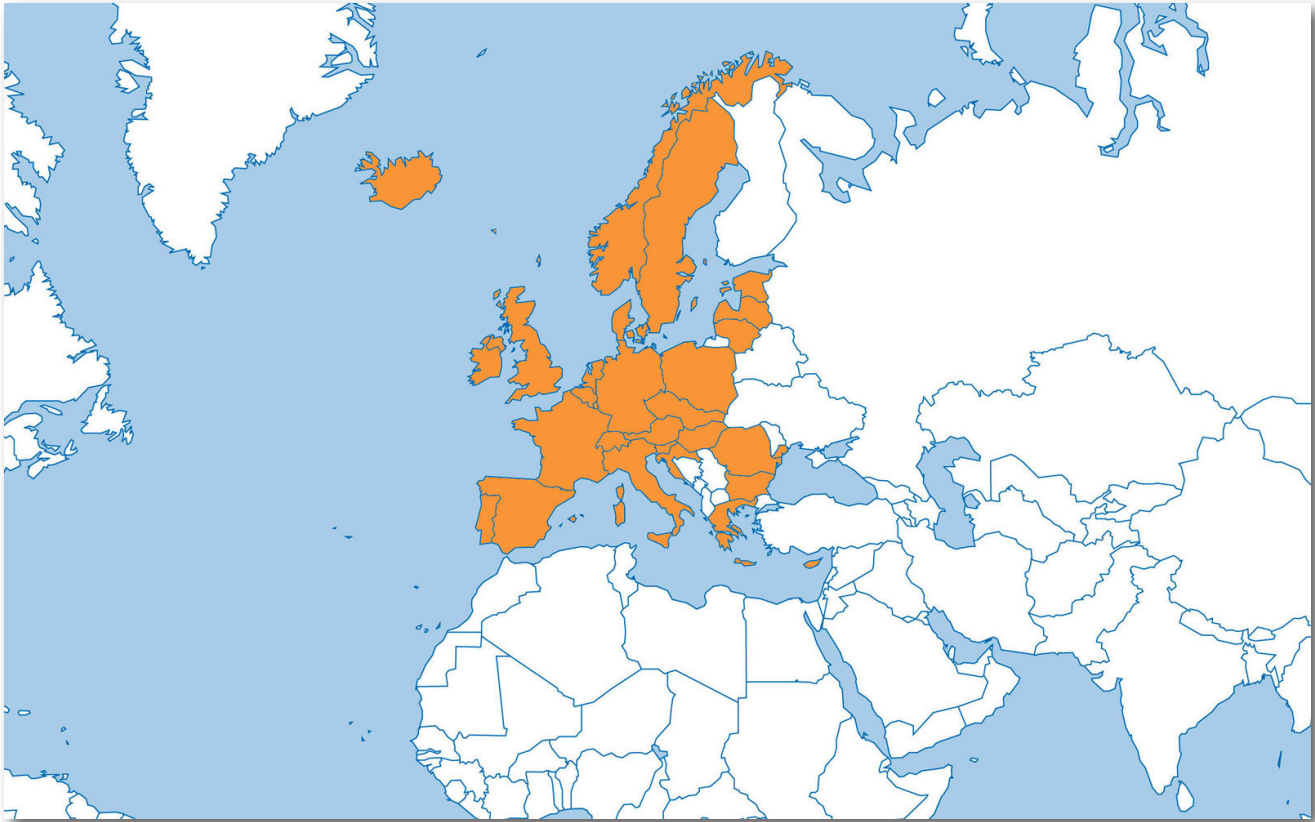


Is Passport-Free Travel in Europe Dead?

by Malena Carollo



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Terrorist attacks, a refugee crisis, and fears about future security threats may put an end to unrestricted travel on the Continent.

For years, travelers have been able to zip around much of Europe without waiting in immigration lines or having their passports examined.

But this week, Sweden and Denmark brought back some border checks—and they're just the latest countries to make it harder to enter.

Starting in the 1990s, 26 European countries removed controls at their borders, creating a zone known as the Schengen Area. It was a boon to commerce and to tourism; traveling around Europe became as easy as passing between U.S. states. But terrorist attacks and a wave of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa have called all that into question.

Last September, with an estimated 8,000 refugees per day entering Europe, Germany implemented checks at the Austrian border, inspecting cars on main highways and stopping trains in an effort to control the flow; the Netherlands started reviewing passports on its German border.

In November, hours after terrorists launched a series of deadly attacks in Paris, French president François Hollande made a declaration: for security's sake, the country's borders would be closed. It was easier said than done—how do you shut the hundreds of roads that enter France from Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland?—and the government soon clarified, saying it would implement border checks. Checkpoints were imposed between France and Belgium indefinitely.

This week, Sweden imposed ID checks on travelers from Denmark, and Denmark put similar

measures in place on its boundary with Germany.

These measures weren't aimed at leisure travelers, but in the fall at least, canceled trains and, in some cases, hours-long waits at highway checkpoints took a toll.

The delays in Germany have abated, says Jens Alberts, a spokesman for the German Consulate General in New York. And, he adds, travelers' paths are unlikely to overlap much with those of refugees. Ilse van Overveld, a spokesperson for the Dutch embassy, says there have not been any significant delays for flights to the Netherlands. "I don't think tourists will feel any different today when they travel to the Netherlands than when they were in the country a year ago," she says.

However, travelers are still likely to be impacted at airports, train stations, sporting events, and holiday gatherings, and to see more of a law-enforcement presence, says **Scott Hume, associate director of security operations at travel-risk agency Global Rescue**. They may face longer lines and more intense scrutiny of documents.

Things could change quickly if another attack occurs. And even if it doesn't, policy shifts may slow down travel. The European Union is considering beefing up its external border-control force, called Frontex. Some politicians were calling for the end of Schengen altogether. Commentators for the Financial Times, Der Spiegel, and others have speculated that the end of a borderless Europe may be upon us.