

## Defenders of the Schengen zone face a battle on many fronts - 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011

European tensions: Immigration has become a volatile issue ahead of a June meeting of EU leaders, writes Stanley Pignal

A year after the advent of the eurozone crisis first raised questions about the European Union's single currency, the Schengen passport-free area has become the second European *grand projet* to run into political trouble.

Tensions around Schengen have risen since the start of the year, when tens of thousands of North Africans fleeing political chaos stumbled into a political landscape that now includes thriving anti-immigration parties in many of the EU's 27 member states.

What started off as a spat between Italy, where some 30,000 Tunisians have landed since February, and France, where most of them have since travelled on to, has changed into a wider European crisis after those two governments demanded and obtained an EU mechanism to shelve passport-free travel as a measure to fight illegal migration. What that means in practice is now the subject of negotiations between national governments and the European Commission, the bloc's executive arm, ahead of a meeting of EU leaders on June 24.

The coming month will be decisive in determining the future of free travel in Europe, says Claude Moraes, a British Socialist European parliamentarian specialising in home affairs.

"Schengen is in serious trouble. Pressure from national governments, often egged [on] by anti-migrant populist parties, has created a climate of fear around open borders."

At the very least, there will be new ways for countries to reimpose temporary

border controls within the Schengen zone, which has expanded since its inception in 1995 to include most EU countries as well as Switzerland, Norway and Iceland.

That has effectively already happened in the case of France and Italy, after Paris bolstered police patrols around the border area in the wake of the Tunisians' arrival. This month, Denmark announced it would resume customs checks at its Swedish and German borders. Both decisions are being scrutinised by Brussels. Defenders of Schengen hope the European Commission, an ardent proponent of the current system, will be put in charge of deciding when border controls can be reinstated. By contrast, member states are demanding more autonomy. Diplomats say talks are proceeding slowly ahead of a meeting of European interior ministers in two weeks' time.

"The situation around immigration right now is like a pressure cooker," says one. "If you open it now, in the current climate, it will explode. The aim is that by June, some of that pressure will have been released and we can have a more conducive conversation on migration."

Analysts warn that Schengen's troubles run deeper than the Franco-Italian. They point to gains made by the far-right in Denmark and the Netherlands - where anti-immigrant parties support ruling coalitions - but also in other countries including France, Italy and Austria.

"Populist parties are now helping to steer the debate on migration," says Elizabeth Collett, a policy fellow at the Migration Policy Institute. "So you have a national imperative to be tough on immigration, which runs up against the very idea of Schengen."

More broadly, she says, there has been an erosion of trust as member states accuse each other of not playing their part in running the system either by blocking migrants from coming in, or not sharing the burden of hosting those who do arrive.

"Schengen is predicated on trust: national governments have to be confident

that other EU governments are upholding their end of the bargain. If that trust disappears the system doesn't work.”

The consequences of that lack of trust are felt in other parts of the EU's home affairs agenda. On Tuesday, the Commission said it would propose a way to reintroduce the need to obtain a visa for citizens from countries that currently do not need one, seemingly focusing on migrants from the western Balkans.

Even the right of EU citizens to settle freely in any country in the bloc is being questioned. The Dutch, prompted by anti-immigrant firebrand Geert Wilders, are pushing for a clearer right to kick out EU citizens who are jobless or who are convicted of breaking laws. France, which last year was castigated by Brussels for deporting Roma migrants to Romania and Bulgaria, also wants more clarity.

Diplomats say the concept of seamless travel within Europe will remain, because it is a tangible success of the EU. But more exceptions to the passport-free norm could appear, depending on the outcome of the current negotiations.

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## Examination for the posts of Second Secretary in the Diplomatic Service of the Government of Malta

English Paper  
June 2011

Time allowed 2 hours

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES' GUIDANCE.  
READ CAREFULLY BEFORE PROCEEDING TO ANSWER THE QUESTION

### Assignment

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta will be attending a conference on various issues related to the Schengen area. The following article highlights some of the problem areas involved.

In this exercise you are expected to assume the role of a Second Secretary within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You are expected to draw up a Memorandum in ENGLISH to the Minister (in about 500 words) providing a brief analytical review of issues referred to in the article, concluding with recommendations as to the positions the Minister should take on the more important ones, highlighting those affecting Malta directly, and justifying your arguments. In this context, credit will be given for your own ideas and proposals which do not feature in the article overleaf.