

# European Union to Tighten Border Entry Rules

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BRUSSELS — Non-Europeans would need to submit biometric data before crossing Europe's frontiers under sweeping European Union proposals to combat illegal migration, terrorism and organized crime that are to be outlined this week.

The plans — arguably the biggest shake-up of border management in Europe since the creation of its internal travel zone — would apply to citizens of the United States and all other countries that now can enter Europe without visas.

They would, however, allow European Union citizens and “low-risk” frequent travelers from outside the bloc to pass through automated, fast-track frontier checkpoints without coming into contact with border guards. Voluntary programs for prescreening such visitors, who would register fingerprints and other data, would be stepped up.

The proposals, contained in draft documents examined by The International Herald Tribune and scheduled to go to the European Commission on Wednesday, were intended to bring the European Union's visa regime into line with a new era in which passports include biometric data, recognition data based on physical characteristics.

The commission, the executive arm of the European Union, contends that migratory pressure, organized crime and terrorism are obvious challenges to the union and that the bloc's border and visa policy need to be brought up to date.

It also wants a new European Border Surveillance System to be created, to use satellites and unmanned aircraft to help track the movements of people suspected of being illegal migrants.

If approved by the commission this week, the measures would need the approval of all European Union states.

The United States routinely requires European citizens to submit fingerprints when crossing its borders, and the commission's document notes that the United States plans to introduce an electronic travel-authorization system for people from countries like Britain, France and Germany that are in its Visa Waiver Program.

The commission's proposals cover the Schengen zone, Europe's internal free-travel area named after the village in Luxembourg near where the original agreement among five countries was signed on June 14, 1985. Twenty-four countries are now members.

It is unclear whether Britain and Ireland, which along with Cyprus, are not members of Schengen, would choose to join the program.

Each year more than 300 million travelers cross European Union borders, but there is no obligation for countries inside the Schengen free-travel zone to keep a record of entries and exits of non-European citizens in a dedicated database. Moreover, if the visitor leaves from another Schengen country, it is often impossible to determine whether the visitor overstayed his or her visa.

The proposals, drafted by the European commissioner for justice and home affairs, Franco Frattini, suggest that non-Europeans on a short-stay visa would be checked against a Visa Information System that is already under construction and should be operational in 2012.

Mr. Frattini is also calling for a new database to be set up to store information on the time and place of entry and exit of non-European citizens, using biometric identifiers. If a visitor overstays a visa, an alert would go out to all national authorities that the person had overstayed the allotted time.

Travelers from countries with a visa requirement would need to provide biometric data at European consulates before leaving their home country. Those arriving from nations not requiring visas, like the United States, would also need to submit fingerprints and a digitized facial image.

But the European Union would try to make the system more user-friendly for Europeans and some categories of bona fide visitors by granting them the status of “registered traveler.”

Non-Europeans could gain the same, fast-track status providing they have not overstayed previous visas, have proof of sufficient funds to pay for their stay in Europe and hold a biometric passport.

The draft documents highlight weaknesses in Europe’s efforts to guard its borders. One paper points out that, in the eight European Union countries with external borders in the Mediterranean Sea and southern Atlantic, frontier surveillance is carried out by about 50 authorities from 30 institutions, sometimes with competing competencies and systems.