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Migration Prompts E.U. to Seek New Travel Rules

By JAMES KANTER

PARIS — The [European Union](#) authorities Friday sought to set new rules to maintain passport-free travel across large parts of the region, a response to recent moves by some governments to reinstate border controls because of mounting concern over what some see as uncontrolled migration from North Africa and the Middle East.

Cecilia Malmstrom, the E.U. commissioner for home affairs, said European member states should be allowed to reintroduce border controls following emergencies, like a terrorist attack — but for periods lasting only five days. She said that under new rules proposed Friday, member states would need permission from the [European Commission](#) and a sufficient number of other governments to enact border controls for longer periods.

That proposal marks a significant change from the current system, under which member states currently can unilaterally decide whether they want to shut their borders for 30 days.

Ms. Malmstrom told a news conference in Brussels on Friday that the changes would help in “protecting one of the most cherished achievements of the E.U.” while giving governments the leeway to protect their borders in extreme situations.

She said the current rules no longer suited a passport-free region that has grown to 25 countries since the system was established in 1985 by six nations including France and Germany in Schengen, a small town in Luxembourg.

Ms. Malmstrom said discussions would begin next week with E.U. governments on the revised rules. Those talks are likely to be tough.

France, Germany and Spain are among countries that already have said they have serious doubts about handing more sovereignty to Brussels on such a sensitive issue.

“The decision whether to reintroduce temporary checks at the internal borders is based on an intensive assessment of the national security situation, which can only be carried out by the

member states on the basis of the expertise and resources of their security authorities,” the interior ministers from France, Germany and Spain said in a joint statement earlier this week.

The new thinking on the Schengen agreement follows a decision by France this year to deploy border guards to push back Tunisian migrants who had previously arrived in Italy and were granted temporary residence permits, and a decision by the Danish government to introduce reinforced checks at its German and Swedish borders.

In another sign of tensions over open borders in Europe, Spain last month won approval to keep Romanians from seeking work there, arguing that its battered economy could not absorb fresh inflows of workers.

In making her proposals, Ms. Malmstrom also was seeking to reassure member states that they would still have the scope to control [immigration](#) once [Bulgaria](#) and [Romania](#), where there are concerns about corruption, are admitted into the Schengen area.

On Thursday, Gerd Leers, the minister for immigration and asylum affairs for the Netherlands, told the Dutch Parliament that his government was not ready to vote in favor of admitting Bulgaria and Romania into the Schengen area because they had not made enough progress on curbing corruption and organized crime.

Yet another factor is the situation in Greece, which had to appeal to the E.U. and other states last year to help protect its land border with Turkey, one of the main entry points for migrants from the Middle East and North Africa.

Ms. Malmstrom said the commission and other E.U. agencies would provide money and equipment to help nations plug their borders and allow the closing of crossing points. Only if those measures failed would reintroduction of wider border controls be permitted, according to the proposals, and that in cases where a state showed a “persistent failure” to protect its section of the external border, then other E.U. member states would be allowed to restrict their borders for extendable six-month periods.

The commission has been at pains to shore up the Schengen agreement.

Ms. Malmstrom said Friday that allowing the free movement of citizens and visitors across Europe provided “huge benefits to the economy.”

She said the boost to labor mobility from new countries joining the E.U. increased its gross domestic product by almost €40 billion, or \$55 billion, between 2004 and 2007.