

Switzerland Opens its Borders in December

Published at: 24-10-2008



The enlargement of the Schengen Area makes further progress. It is possible that even before Christmas Austria's neighbour levels custom barriers. Circles in Brussels already discuss Switzerland's "Christmas present", "Die Presse" reports. This is due to the fact that the country should be accepted in the Schengen zone. The possible dates are December 12th or 15th. A summit of the justice and internal affairs ministers of all 27 EU members will define the date of acceptance. After that date Switzerland's border restrictions will be finally abolished and the lengthy customs examinations will belong to the past.

Switzerland will be the 25th country to introduce scheme. Besides the 22 EU member-states, Iceland and Norway are also in the zone. Five of the EU countries are not in the Schengen area: the UK, Ireland, Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus. Cyprus will soon enter the agreement. This will also happen with Switzerland's neighbour - Lichtenstein. The restrictions were just abolished for 9 Eastern European countries from the EU on December 21st, 2007.

The long customs checks will also be over on Swiss airports. Still Schengen borders will not be open there until March 29th when summer flight schedules come into force.

Switzerland prepared for entering Schengen for a long time. Preconditions to entering the area include computer system which can transfer data about suspicious passengers to other Schengen members, separate zones on the airports, security for the new external borders of the zone. In the case of Switzerland this would be the Lichtenstein border, although Lichtenstein is entirely surrounded by Schengen members. The ministers of Foreign affairs agreed that there will be no additional restrictions for Lichtenstein since the country does not have its own international airport.

So far Lichtenstein and Switzerland have maintained open police cooperation which will grow even stronger with Switzerland's acceptance in Schengen. Besides the additional patrol and the mutual strip there will also be a 24 hour video surveillance of the mutual border. Lichtenstein will join the agreement as soon as it brings its computer system up to Schengen standards. Brussels experts think this will happen in year and a half to two years.