

The Visa Issuance Practice in the Visegrad Countries: Present Situation and Recommendations for the Future

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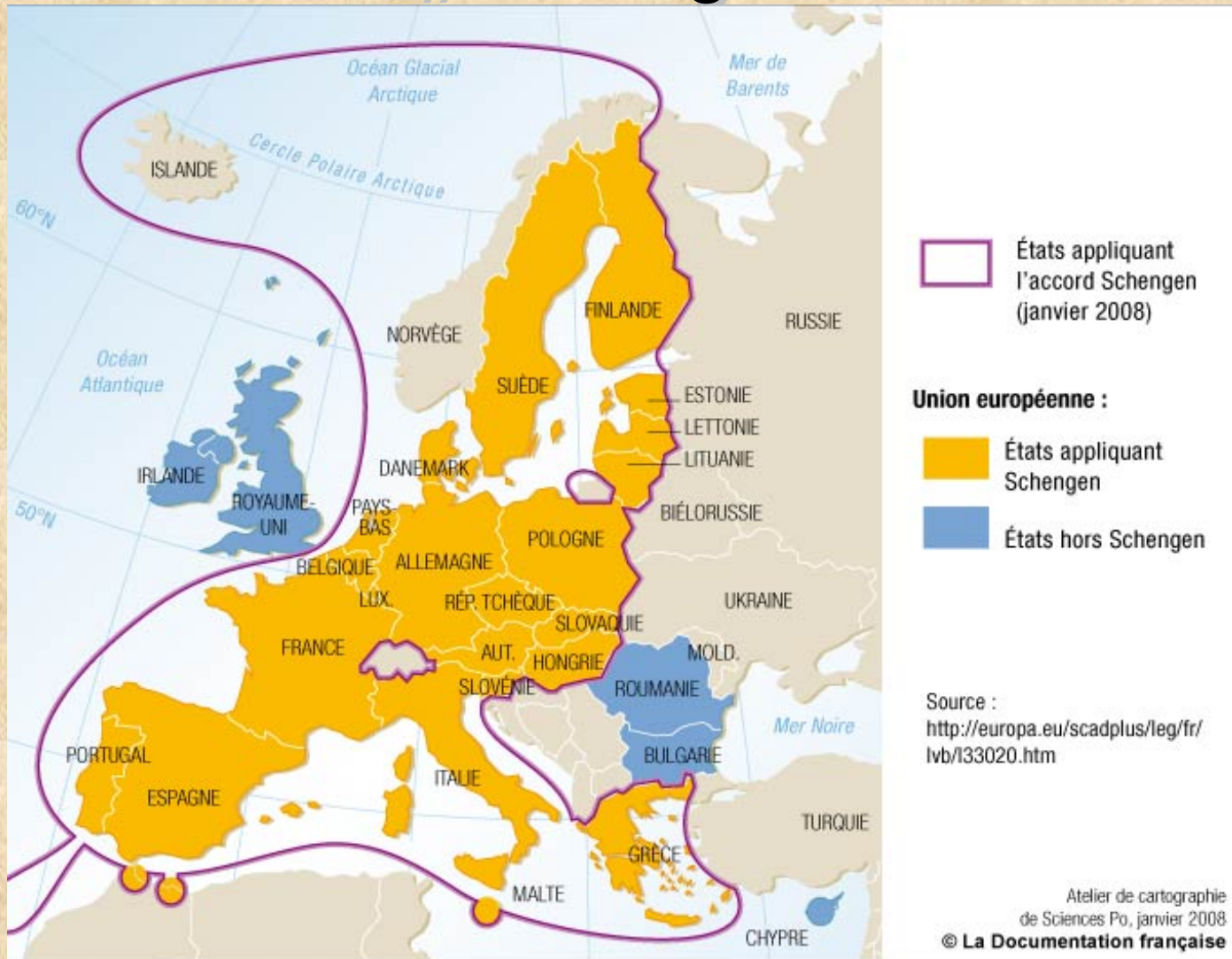
„Workshop on Visa and Migration in Europe”

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I. V4 countries as compared to other EU MS

- Common experience on the limited freedom of travel during the Soviet rule. After the change of regimes → all enjoyed visa free travel to W-E.
- All V4 became full Schengen member at the same time (21.12.2007) → one of the last stages of removing divisions between „old” & „new” MS.
- Three V4 states are on the Eastern external border of the EU + all have intensive social, economic, cultural ties with the Eastern CIS neighbours: **BLR, MOL, RUS, UKR** + good neighbourly relationship is one of the top priorities of the V4 cooperation.

The „Schengenland”



L'espace Schengen en janvier 2008

Source : La Documentation Photographique n°8063

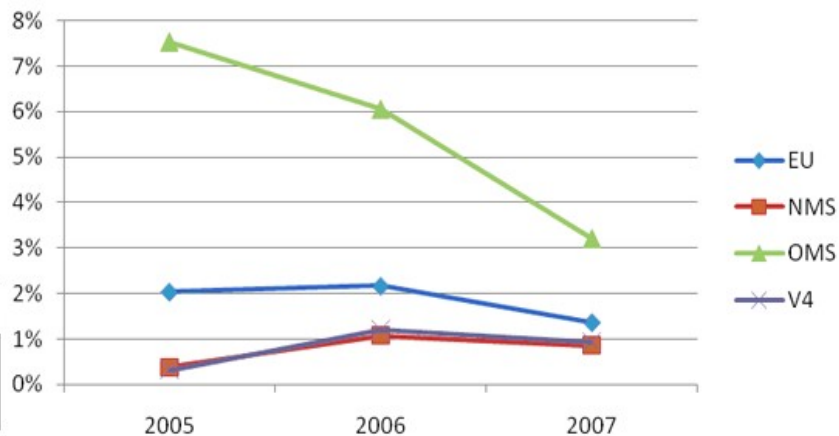
II. Differences of attitudes in V4 before full Schengen membership

- Σ : **HU, POL**: more liberal visa policies, **SK, CZ**: more restrictive attitude.
- In the beginning of '90: visa free travel for nationals of BLR, MOL, RUS and UKR → then gradual change (reason: harmonising national law with EC law).
- **CZ**= 2000; **SK**= 2000-2001 – visa requirement → why? Lack of strategy towards Eastern countries; stronger security-related approach; too fast adaptation to EU *acquis*.
- **PL** = 2001 (MOL), 2003 (others) → but no or symbolic visa fees + low D-visa fees for BLR, UKR (20 EUR).
- **HU** = 2001 (MOL, RUS, BLR), 2003 (UKR – Hungarian minorities living there) → but some facilitation: a) no visa fee for UKR citizens; b) new consulate in Beregovo; longer office hours.

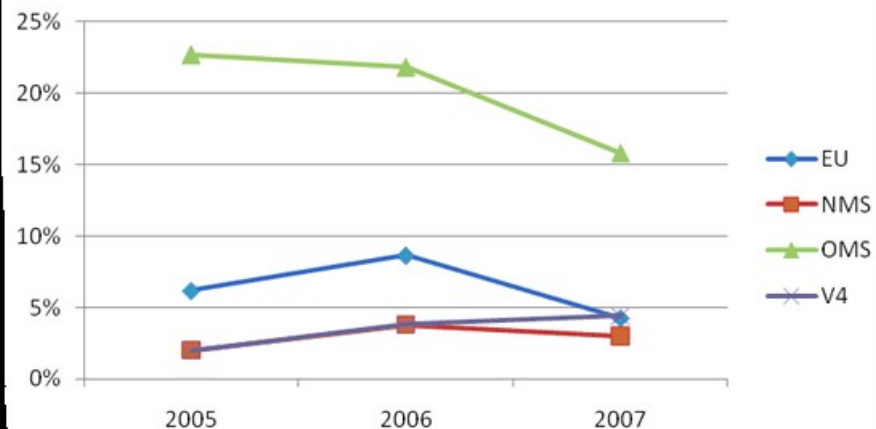
III. Statistical figures on V4 visa issuance practice (2005-2007)

- **All visas** issued by V4 countries in the four CIS countries: significant part of visas issued by all EU MS in this region
[highest share for BLR (45%) & UKR (67%) + before RO/BG accession to the EU & creation of the CAC in Chisinau, for MOL as well (75% in 2006)]
- **Wide network of diplomatic/consular posts** (f. ex: **PL** has 5 in UKR, 4 in RUS; **HU** has 3 in UKR + RUS, in MOL: CAC)
- **Refusal rates**: highest in MOL, varied between 2 – 4.5 % in V4 (EU average: 4 – 8.5% in the same period). Lowest share: BLR, 0.5 – 1% for V4 (EU average: 1.5 – 2%)

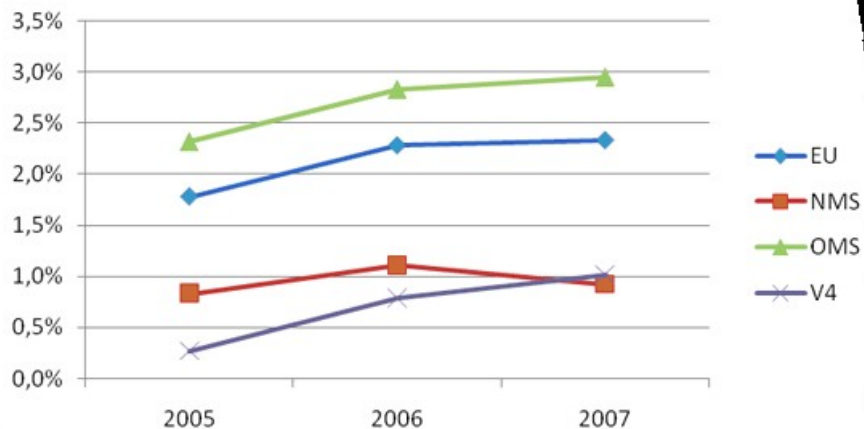
Refusal rates - Belarus



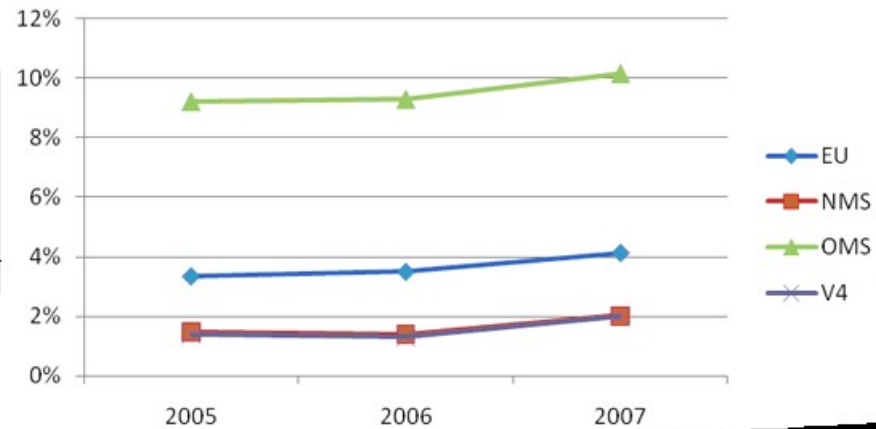
Refusal rates - Moldova



Refusal rates - Russia



Refusal rates - Ukraine



IV. Situation after the Schengen Accession

- Influence of Schengen + Visa Facilitation Agreements (VFA): drop in the number of issued visas.
- To the smallest extent: **CZ** (6-13 %), **SK**: bit bigger, **HU**: in relation to UKR (48%) and BLR (40%); **PL**: UKR (59%) and BLR (74%).
- From the perspective of the Eastern neighbours, the situation is the best for RUS. In MOL: increase because of the CAC. Worst = BLR (mainly due to the 60 EUR visa fee).
- Refusal rate: did not change much → reason for the drop in issued visa: mainly the smaller number of applicants + multiple entry visas.
- Obstacles: visa fee, many formalities, supporting documents, work input.

V. Facilitations allowed by the Schengen *acquis*

- Based on EU Regulation, local border traffic agreements (HU-UKR, SK-UKR, PL-UKR + ongoing negotiations) → with LBTP, no visa needed, 1-5 years, no stamping, within the border area (30 km, in exceptional cases: 50 km).

Comment: no coordination between the V4 concerned, PL + SK did not make full use of experiences of HU.

- Holders of the Hungarian Card can have their visa fees reimbursed (35 + 15 EUR).
- In UKR: 2 main Hungarian minority organisations are entitled to issue letters of support accepted by HU consulates.
- Longer office hours to alleviate queues + refurbished buildings, more humane milieu.

VI. Recommendations

General: V4 visa policies should be more coherent with their foreign policy, since Eastern neighbouring states are of key importance for them.

Specific activities:

1) *In individual V4 countries*

- within the framework of the Schengen *acquis* (new EU Visa Code), make the procedure less burdensome for applicants
- issuing multiple-entry visas with long period of validity (for persons having positive visa history, frequent travellers)
- better dissemination of information on visas (not only in consulates, but via websites, e-mail, phone etc.)
- less supporting documents
- better use of modern technologies in the visa application process
- appropriate approach to visa applicants

VI. Recommendations (cont.)

2) *Cooperation between V4*

- coordinating the actions in concluding future LBT Agreements + consultations on their implementation
- exchange of experiences on labour migrants (former visa holders)
- closer cooperation of consular posts

3) *Joint efforts on EU level*

- further support of visa liberalisation (e.g.: W-B)
- evaluation of VFA
- abolishment of visa fees for selected third countries (COM analysis: potential cost of such a decision is not that high) → already showed support for BLR



THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION!

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