

Biometric Passport Control: No Place To Hide

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Siemens is making border crossings in Europe more secure through biometric systems that store individual characteristics such as fingerprints and facial photos on a chip integrated into a passport.

The systems have already been installed in several countries. The data is read at a passport checkpoint and compared with a live digital photo of the traveler, thereby making it practically impossible to travel with a false passport. The system software was developed in the Biometrics Center in Graz, Austria.

Switzerland introduced biometric passports in September 2006, and

Siemens IT Solutions and Services recently provided a solution for producing so-called e-passports to the Czech Republic. To this end, SIS equipped some 230 passport control stations in that country with around 600 photo stands, passport scanning machines, and printers, as well as corresponding IT systems. In the future, an ultra-thin RFID chip equipped with an antenna will be embedded into Czech passports.

The chip will store personal data such as the passport holder's name and date of birth, as well as a digital photo and fingerprint that will be read by special scanning devices at border crossings. The traveler's actual fingerprint will be read by a fingerprint scanner, while his or her photograph will be taken by a digital camera and then compared with the picture stored on the chip. One of the criteria the camera system will use here will be the unique positioning of each person's eyes.

Siemens IT Solutions installed a border control system with fingerprint scanners, cameras, and high-performance IT equipment in Croatia last spring. Along with personalized data, Croatian border police can now compare the validity of visas with information stored in a central database at the Interior Ministry. The system can also use cameras to register license plates and vehicle models at border crossings, thereby making it easier to identify stolen cars.

The new system is already being used at the border crossing in Bajakov and at Zagreb Airport. Croatia is one of the first countries in Europe now able to process e-passports. The Siemens system will make it possible to implement new automatic biometric border control solutions in Europe based on RTP (Registered Traveler Programs). Croatia will gradually be followed by other countries, as all EU member states and Schengen signatories have pledged to include digital photos and fingerprints in their passports by 2009.

Source: Siemens

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