

MIGRANTS, 'MURASHKY,' AND THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER.

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In

July 2003, Poland will become the last Central European state to introduce visas for Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus prior to joining the European Union in January 2004. Poland has already introduced visas for most other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Despite the success of the Polish-Ukrainian "strategic partnership," the introduction of visas for Ukrainians, Russians, and Belarusians is popular in Poland. The Polish Public Opinion Research Center found in an August poll that 41 percent of Poles believe the EU should help Poland introduce visas, 23 percent think the EU should jointly guard Poland's eastern border, and 22 percent think it is up to Poland to "efficiently guard our border against illegal immigrants" after joining the EU.

The Polish authorities are planning an extensive overhaul of their border with the CIS, which will become the EU's (and "Europe's") border in July 2003. (The Polish-Lithuanian border is exempted.) In February, Poland submitted a 92-page report to the EU outlining steps it was taking on its eastern border.

Since June, all of Poland's eastern border crossings have had complete online connections to border-guard headquarters. Poland is planning to expand the number of border troops so that each of its 94 guard posts on its eastern border will control 29 kilometers by 2006, when the Schengen agreements go into effect, which is higher than the EU norm of 25 kilometers. There are currently 85 posts controlling 35 kilometers each.

Equipment for these new border posts has been funded by the EU. This year, 10 more patrol cars were purchased with thermal-vision cameras and 50 more are to be bought. Each guard post has night-vision goggles. Land Rovers; modern motorcycles; new high-speed patrol boats; six helicopters; and five Wilga planes, each equipped with nighttime, thermal-vision cameras have been purchased. Border troops have also been issued new uniforms and modern short weapons.

The introduction of Polish visas will have a threefold effect on countries bordering Poland, such as Ukraine.

First, it will increase the number of illegal migrants in Ukraine. Between 1991-2000, the number of migrants in Ukraine increased from 184 to 24,000 per annum. Some 25,000-30,000 illegal immigrants are detained annually. Most are from Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. In the first half of 2002, 2,000 illegal immigrants were captured by Ukrainian border troops, with 4,500 caught last year. Ukraine's location as a transit point could be

seen from figures released in the first eight months of this year, which showed that 24 million people crossed Ukraine's borders in both directions.

After 10 days in custody, migrants are released because Ukraine has no extradition agreements with bordering states. In 1995, Ukraine had 300,000 illegal migrants. With no source of income, these illegal migrants often have little option but to turn to crime to support themselves. In 1996, illegal migrants committed 80,000 criminal offenses. Many of the migrants themselves bring narcotics and weapons into the country. Seventy-eight weapons were confiscated from the 2,000 illegal migrants caught this year.

This large number of immigrants breeds corruption among state officials and fuels organized crime. The Ministry of Defense's "Narodna armiya" reported on 6 October 1995 that illegal migration was already then evolving "into a well-organized criminal business, where contraband of 'live goods' is becoming a basis of income for the national and international criminal world."

The sums involved in the trade of illegal migrants are huge. A report in "Kievskie vedomosti" on 18 January discussed an Asian trafficker who annually made up to \$500,000 by sending 200 migrants each month and charging anything between \$5,000 and \$8,000 per person. In July, a Greek court sentenced two Ukrainians to 10 years' imprisonment each for smuggling Iraqi immigrants into Greece.

If migrants travel directly to Ukraine, they often pretend to be future students and use forged identification documents. The cost of one forged document is \$25,000, the Security Service of Ukraine reported. Some 30 percent of foreigners arriving in Ukraine to study are potentially illegal migrants.

Last year, several oblast heads and 20 lower-ranking officers of the State Traffic Inspectorate were dismissed for assisting illegal migration. In the first half of this year, 150 Ukrainian border troops were fired for corruption and failing "to properly organize border crossing for travelers" as part of a new campaign to improve the conduct and culture of this branch of Ukraine's security forces.

Second, the introduction of visas will halt the extensive cross-border trade. The Gdansk-based Institute for a Market Economy has calculated that this largely unregistered trade generated annually \$2.2 billion-\$3.5 billion in the second half of the 1990s. Visas would most affect the economy of border regions that are economically depressed, such as Przemysl. The head of Ukraine's border troops, Vasyl Sevratyuk, believes that the new visas will hurt law-abiding shuttle traders ("murashky") more than illegal migrants. In 2001, 13.5 million people crossed from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus into Poland.

Third, because Russia continues to block the demarcation of the Ukrainian-Russian border, this porous frontier is a route favored by migrants. Until last year, migrants could obtain a Russian visa and then travel to Ukraine with no visa and move on into Central and Western Europe. In economically depressed Transcarpathia, "Many locals earn their living by assisting in the trafficking of illegal migrants," "Kievskie vedomosti" reported.

The EU is to provide Ukraine with 16 million euros (\$15.5 million) to improve its western border, which inherited a Soviet border infrastructure such as barbed wire and watchtowers. These funds would have been better used on the Ukrainian-Russian border to stem the flow of illegal migrants and contraband. President Kuchma admitted in October 2001 that: "We are now unable to seal our borders. Only our western borders are sealed."

Barbed wire and alarm systems are being dismantled on Ukraine's western border. Instead, there are to be border inspectors who will live in border villages and have the same powers as district police inspectors. Beginning this year, tourists from the EU, the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia no longer need visas to enter Ukraine.

Although Ukraine is reluctant to demarcate its border with Russia unilaterally, it has undertaken some measures of its own. In Luhansk Oblast, border checkpoints have been installed every 25-30 kilometers. The number of border troops is to be increased from 45,000 to 50,000, with the added numbers to be stationed on Ukraine's border with Russia. In addition, border troops are to be relocated from Ukraine's western to the eastern border.