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Automatic passport control to expand at Vaalimaa border station end of this year

At the end of this year, holders of Russian passports will be included among those who can use an automatic border control system at the Vaalimaa border crossing station. It is a self-service system for verifying the passenger's identity and the authenticity of documents.

At present the possibility to use the automatic check is given mainly to Finns and other EU citizens with a so-called biometric passport. In addition to personal data, biometric passports have an embedded digital photograph of the traveller.

At the end of the year, the electronic border control system will also be opened for all those passengers who need a visa to travel to Finland. Finnish passport holders are identified by their facial features, but Russians and other travellers who require visas to travel to the EU will be recognised by their fingerprints.

In Finland, automatic passport readers are in service only in two locations. Helsinki-Vantaa Airport was equipped with three devices in the summer of 2008, while at Vaalimaa the self-service system has been tested since December.

"The first impression has been that the passport scanner is OK. However, the system still needs some fine-tuning while the waiting time should also be shortened", says **Timo Mäkelä**, the deputy chief at the Vaalimaa border crossing station.

In connection with a renovation, the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport is to have another ten scanners. By using such devices, the Finnish Border Guard is trying to ease the flow of border traffic, while at the same time moving officials from passport control to other jobs.


"Actually, we have to do something, as traffic volumes are growing while our own personnel resources are declining", notes **Jaakko Hamunen**, a head of unit at the Finnish Border Guard.

At the Vaalimaa border crossing station, only a small part of travellers have been able to use an automatic passport scanner, as four in five of those crossing the border are nationals of Russia. Even though the self-service system has not been used very much, during peak hours the automatic scanner has eased congestion.

On her trip to Russia to buy petrol, **Sari Vapalahti** from Hamina is trying the automatic scanner for the first time. The device takes a photo of her, and after a while, the gates open.

"This is quite handy, but I still prefer human beings to



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scanners", Vapalahti notes.

Timo Mäkelä does not believe that non-authorized arrivals could abuse the system.

"On the contrary, I would venture to say that the risk of being exposed could be even greater", Mäkelä claims.

Links:

- ▶ [Finland introduces new biometric passports today \(21.8.2006\)](#)
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