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News: Schengen zone

- Bulgaria and Romania will join the European Union's Schengen zone on 1st January 2025. Both nations, which have been EU members since 2007, will finally be able to join the borderless area, allowing for seamless travel and movement across Europe.

Schengen Area

- The Schengen Agreement is a treaty signed in 1985 by five member states (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) of the European Economic Community.
- The agreement is named after a small village in Luxembourg, where the Schengen Agreement (1985) and Schengen Convention (1990) were signed.
- The Schengen Area is an area comprising 29 European countries that have officially abolished all passport and all other types of border control at their mutual borders.
- The area mostly functions as a single jurisdiction for international travel purposes, with a common visa policy.

- **Schengen Evaluation:** Countries wishing to join the Schengen Area must meet **specific criteria**, including effective border control, visa issuance, and law enforcement cooperation.
- Of the **27 EU member states**, **24 participate** in the Schengen Area. Of the three EU members that are not part of the Schengen Area, two —**Croatia and Cyprus**—are legally obliged to join the area in the future, while the other one—**Ireland**—maintains an opt-out.
- **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Kosovo** are members of Schengen Area, but not EU.
- The **decrease in the cost of trade due to Schengen varies from 0.42% to 1.59%** depending on geography, trade partners, and other factors.

Key Features of the Schengen Zone

- **Free Movement:** The Schengen Area **guarantees free movement for over 425 million EU citizens and non-EU nationals legally residing in or visiting the EU.**
- By abolishing internal border checks, it **allows seamless travel, living, and working across participating countries.**
- A **uniform visa policy allows short-term stays of up to 90 days for tourists, business travelers, and other visitors.**

- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** The Schengen Area includes provisions for police cooperation, judicial collaboration, and the Schengen Information System (SIS) to ensure security.
- SIS is the most widely used and largest information sharing system for security and border management in Europe.
- **Temporary Border Controls:** In exceptional circumstances, countries can temporarily reintroduce border controls for security reasons, but they must inform other member states and the European Commission.

European Union (EU)

- European Union is found by Maastricht treaty in 1993 (amended thrice by Treaty of Amsterdam 1997, Treaty of Nice 2001 and Treaty of Lisbon 2007).
- EU is a Political and Economic Union of 27 member states.
- Combined area is 4,233,255.3 km² and population is about 447 million.
- Combined GDP of European Union members are \$20 trillion (25% of Global GDP).
- Members: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

- EU countries are having **High Human Development Index**.
- EU is funding Electronic Auto-rickshaw in India named “**Namma Auto**”.
- In the recent India visit, Ambassador of EU to India announced the setting up of India’s first major off-shore wind energy power plant in Gujarat.
- On **1 December 2009, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force and reformed many aspects of the EU**. In particular, it changed the legal structure of the European Union, merging the EU three pillars system into a single legal entity provisioned with a legal personality, created a permanent President of the European Council, the first of which was Herman Van Rompuy, and strengthened the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.
- There are **five recognised candidates for membership of the European Union**: Turkey (applied in 1987), North Macedonia (applied in 2004), Montenegro (applied in 2008), Albania (applied in 2009), and Serbia (applied in 2009). All have started accession negotiations.
- Kosovo, whose independence is not recognised by five EU member states and Bosnia and Herzegovina are recognised as potential candidates for membership by the EU.
- The accession criteria are included in **Copenhagen criteria**.

Eurozone

- Eurozone is a **currency union of 20 member states of the European Union (EU) that have adopted the euro as their primary currency and sole legal tender, and have thus fully implemented EMU policies.**
- **Countries in European Union but out of Eurozone are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden.**
- Countries in Eurozone have to **fulfill 5 economic criteria, known as euro convergence criteria or the Maastricht criteria.** These criteria are based on Article 140 of the Treaty of functioning of the European Union.
- There are countries which are not in Eurozone, but **uses Euro with formal agreement (Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City) and without any agreement (Kosovo and Montenegro).**