Crossing Borders: Security and Privacy Issues of the European e-Passport*

Jaap-Henk Hoepman, Engelbert Hubbers, Bart Jacobs, Martijn Oostdijk, and Ronny Wichers Schreur

Institute for Computing and Information Sciences
Radboud University Nijmegen
P.O. Box 9010, 6500 GL Nijmegen, the Netherlands
{jhh, hubbers, bart, martijno, ronny}@cs.ru.nl

Abstract. The first generation of European e-passports will be issued in 2006. We discuss how borders are crossed regarding the security and privacy erosion of the proposed schemes, and show which borders need to be crossed to improve the security and the privacy protection of the next generation of e-passports. In particular we discuss attacks on Basic Access Control due to the low entropy of the data from which the access keys are derived, we sketch the European proposals for Extended Access Control and the weaknesses in that scheme, and show how fundamentally different design decisions can make e-passports more secure.

1 Introduction

After several years of preparation, many countries start issuing e-passports with an embedded chip holding biometric data of the passport holder in 2006. This is a major ICT-operation, involving many countries, most of them providing their own implementation, using biometrics at an unprecedented scale. Passport security must conform to international (public) standards, issued by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) [11, 10]. The standards cover confidentiality, integrity and authenticity of the passport data, including the facial image. Additionally, the European Union (EU) has developed its own standards (called "Extended Access Control").

The present paper reviews these developments (like in [14, 15]) especially from a European perspective, with corresponding emphasis on fingerprint protection. Also it tries to put these developments within a wider perspective of identity management (IM) by governments, following [8]. This leads to a "revision" plan for e-passports.

From an academic background we, the authors, closely follow the introduction of the e-passport in the Netherlands. We have advised the government on several matters, and are involved in public debates on related issues. We have received an early test version of the e-passport, and developed our own reader-side software, based on the ICAO protocols. We have had access to confidential

* Id: passport.tex,v 1.44 2006/06/30 07:25:14 ronny Exp.

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material regarding the EU-protocols. However, the present paper is based solely on publicly available material, and is organised as follows.

We first discuss the main security requirements the new e-passport should satisfy. After a brief discussion of biometry in Sect. 3, we describe the standard security measures of the ICAO standard and the weaknesses associated with them in Sect. 4. Future European e-passports will be equipped with Extended Access Control, which we outline in Sect. 5, and whose shortcomings we also study. e-Passports enable new applications. Sect. 6 discusses the danger of such function creep but also investigates the new possibilities created by such applications. We study identity management issues of the e-passport in Sect. 7, and evaluate the realisation of the original goals in Sect. 8. We finish the paper with some proposals for more fundamental changes to the architecture of a second generation of e-passports that will increase both their security and their flexibility of use in new applications.

2 Aims and Security Goals

It is a fact that modern passports are hard to forge. Thus, many criminal organisations do not even try such fraud, but instead collect large numbers of genuine passports, and pick one that shows a reasonable resemblance to a member that needs a new identity. Similarly, passports are sometimes borrowed for illegal border crossing, and later returned to the rightful owner.

The original aim of the use of biometrics in travel documents is thus to combat "look-alike" fraud. Hence the emphasis is on biometric *verification* (instead of *identification*), involving a 1:1 check to make sure that a particular passport really belongs to a particular person.

The biometrics of the passport holder will be included in a chip that is embedded in the passport. Communication with the chip will be wireless, and not via contact points, because wireless communication allows higher data rates, does not involve wear, and does not require a change of the standard format of the passport to for instance credit-card size[1].

The wireless character does introduce new security risks (with respect to traditional passports), for the holder, the issuing state, and for the accepting state. At a high level of abstraction, the following three security goals seem reasonable. The first two focus on confidentiality for the passport holder. The last one mainly concerns the accepting (and also issuing) state.

1. A passport reader should identify itself first, so that only "trusted" parties get to read the information stored in the chip.
2. No identifying information should be released without consent of the passport holder.
3. The receiver of the information should be able to establish the integrity and authenticity of the data.

[1] A change of format for other official documents, like a drivers licence, is seen as less problematic, because such a document is not stamped.

The first goal relates to the situation where for instance a police officer wishes to check your identity. In most countries you have the right to ask the police officer in question to identify himself first, so that you can be sure that you are dealing with a genuine representative of the state. The second goal is relevant to prevent "RFID-bombs" [14] for instance, that are activated by the immediate presence of (the passport of) a particular person, or citizen of a particular country. Such information is also useful for a terrorist who is trying to decide whether to blow himself up in a particular bus. We shall evaluate the realisation of these goals later on, in Sect. 8

3 Biometry

This paper does not focus on the biometry involved, but a few words are in order. ICAO has opted for the use of facial images and fingerprints as primary biometrics because they are reasonably familiar, easy to use, and non-intrusive. A controversial issue—from a privacy perspective—is that the passport chip will not contain templates but pictures (actual JPEGs). The reason is that there is no well-established digital standard for such templates, and early commitment to a closed proprietary format is not desirable. This means that if a passport chip (or data base, or reader) is compromised, original biometric data leaks out, which may lead to reconstruction and additional (identity) fraud.

The effectiveness of biometry is highly overrated, especially by politicians and policy makers. Despite rapid growth in applications, the large-scale use of biometry is untested. The difficulty is that it is not only unproven in a huge single application (such as e-passports), but also not with many different applications in parallel (including "biometry for fun"). The interference caused by the diversity of applications—each with its own security policy, if any—may lead to unforeseen forms of fraud.

A basic issue that is often overlooked is fallback. What if my biometric identity has been compromised, and I am held responsible for something I really did not do, how can I still prove "it wasn't me"?

The Netherlands has recently conducted a field test for the enrolment procedures of the biometric passport, see [19], involving almost 15.000 participants. The precise interpretation of the outcome is unclear, but failure-to-acquire turns out to be a significant problem, especially for young and elderly people. Substantial numbers of people will thus not have appropriate biometric travel documents, so that fully automatic border crossing is not an option.

4 Standard Security Measures (ICAO)

The various ICAO standards for machine readable travel documents, notably [11] and [10], specify precise requirements for accessing and interpreting the contents of the embedded chip. Different security controls are described to ensure that different security goals are met. We discuss these in the order in which the mechanisms are used in a typical session between reader (or: inspection system,

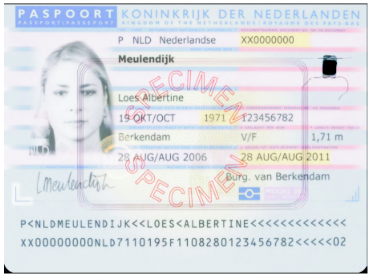

Fig. 1. Example of a Dutch passport. The two bottom lines of text are the MRZ.

the computer that is attempting to read information from the document) and the European passport chip.

BAC: Basic Access Control. Before any information can be read from a passport, the reader needs to go through *basic access control* (BAC). This is a challenge-response protocol in which the reader proves to the passport that it has knowledge of the contents of the machine readable zone (MRZ). The MRZ consists of two lines of optically readable text containing among others the name of the holder, and the passport number. It is printed on the first page of the physical document (See Fig. 1).

The procedure is as follows. The reader optically reads the contents of the MRZ, and derives the *access key* seed $k_{IFD/ICC}$ from the data it reads. After that, the reader proves to the chip that it has optically read the MRZ by signing a random challenge from the chip using a key derived from the access key seed. Subsequently, passport and inspection system exchange some extra random data, which is then used to generate session keys and an initial counter for secure messaging. The session keys are fresh for each session.

BAC prevents so-called *skimming* of passports, i.e., reading the contents without the cardholder's knowledge. Note that BAC does not authenticate the reader: anyone who knows the MRZ can successfully complete BAC and continue reading other information on the chip.

SM: Secure Messaging. Confidentiality and integrity of all communication between reader and passport is provided by so-called *secure messaging*. Commands sent to the passport as well as responses sent back to the reader are encrypted and augmented with a message authentication code (MAC), using the keys established during BAC. A sequence counter is included to prevent replay of messages.

PA: Passive Authentication. The data stored on the passport is organised in a logical data structure (LDS), which consists of a number of files (called data groups). Typical examples of data groups are: a file containing the information in the MRZ, a file containing a JPEG image of the cardholder's face, and files containing other biometric features such as the cardholder's fingerprints.

Each data group in the LDS is hashed. All these hashes together form the (document) *security object* SO_{LDS}. The security object is signed by the issuing country and the result, SO_D, is stored on the passport as well. This means that the inspection system can check that the contents of the LDS have not been altered during communication, thus ensuring the integrity of the LDS. The standards refer to this integrity protection mechanism as *passive authentication.*

AA: Active Authentication. To prevent cloning of the chip, an integrity mechanism called *active authentication* is used, in which the passport proves possession of a private key k_{AA} using a challenge-response protocol. The corresponding public key, needed by the inspection system to check the response of the passport, is part of the LDS and can be read by the inspection system. A hash of this public key is signed through the SO_D, to ensure authenticity.

4.1 Guessing the Access Key

To access the passport without having its MRZ, one needs to guess the access key seed $k_{IFD/ICC}$, which is 128 bits long. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) [18] and the ECRYPT EU Network of Excellence on cryptology [3] recommend 80 bits for a minimal level of general purpose protection in 2005, and 112 bits ten years from now. In other words, the access key seed is long enough to provide adequate security.

But the fact that the access key seed is derived from information in the MRZ can be used to the attackers' advantage. The 'MRZ-information' consists of the concatenation of the passport number, date of birth and date of expiry, including their respective check digits, as described in [9]. Given a guess for the MRZ-information, the corresponding access key seed $k_{IFD/ICC}$ is easily calculated, and from that all other session keys can be derived as well. These keys can then be tried against a transcript of an eavesdropped communication session between this passport and the reader, to see if they deliver meaningful data.

To estimate the amount of work the attacker needs to perform for such an off-line attack, we estimate the amount of Shannon entropy of each of these fields. We should stress this is a very crude approach (unless we assume the underlying probability distributions are uniform). For lower bounds, we should in fact use the Guessing entropy [17] ($\sum_i ip_i$) or even the min-entropy ($\min_i - \log p_i$). The Shannon entropy only gives us an upper bound, but if that bound is small the security of the system is most certainly weak.

The entropy of the *date of birth* field is $\log(100 \times 365.25) = 15.16$ bits, as it can contain only the last two digits of the year of birth. If one can see the holder of the passport and guess his age correct within a margin of 5 years, the entropy of this field decreases to 10.83.

The *date of expiry* is determined by the date of issuing and the validity period of a passport. In the Netherlands, passports are valid for 5 years, and are issued only on working days (barring exceptional circumstances). For a *valid* passport, the entropy of this field becomes $\log(5 \times 365.25 \times 5/7) = 10.34$.

The MRZ field for the *passport number* can contain 9 characters. If the passport number is longer, the excess characters are stored in the MRZ optional data field (which is not used to derive the access key seed). The entropy of

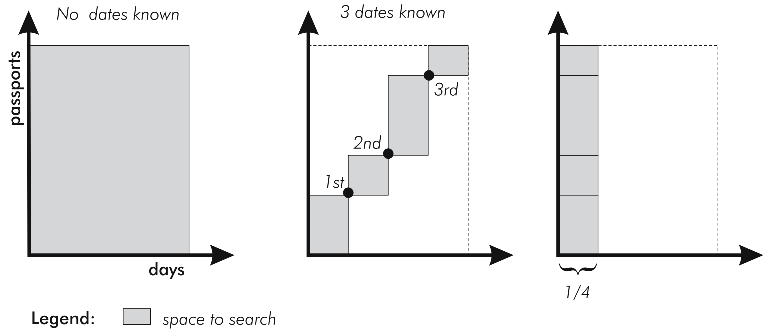

Fig. 2. Known dates of issuing reduce the search space

the passport number field, assuming digits and upper-case letters only, becomes $\log((26+10)^9) = 46.53$. Many countries have further restrictions on the format of their passport numbers. Passport numbers may contain check digits, or start with a common prefix to distinguish passport types (e.g., military passports).

At best, the total entropy of date of birth, date of expiry and passport number becomes $15.16+10.34+46.53 = 72.03$, which is less than 80 bits recommended by both NIST and ECRYPT [3, 18] to protect against eavesdropping and other off-line attacks. It *is* sufficient to protect against skimming attacks (where possible keys are tried on-line) because the passport is slow to respond to each individual key tried.

In certain countries the situation is even worse. Often, passport numbers are issued sequentially. This implies there is a correlation between the date of issue (and therefore date of expiry) and the passport number. Moreover, all currently valid passports numbers (ignoring stolen or otherwise invalidated ones) form a consecutive range, which is no longer than the total number of people of that nationality. For the Dutch passport for instance, bounding the population from above by 20 million, the passport number entropy drops to $\log(20\times10^6) = 24.25$.

With sequentially issued passports, the entropy drops even further with every known combination of a passport number and the expiry date. Suppose we know k such combinations. This gives rise to $k+1$ intervals of possible passport numbers for a given date range Let us take the rather pessimistic approach that we do not assume anything about the distribution of passports over dates within those intervals (although it is very likely that passports are issued at a reasonably constant rate). On the optimistic side, let us assume the k known passports are issued evenly distributed over the validity period length. This reduces the search space by a factor $k+1$ as illustrated in Fig. 2. Hence the entropy of expiry date plus passport number drops with $\log(k+1)$. For the Dutch passport, using $k = 15$ and the figures above, the entropy of the passport number becomes as small as 20.25, and the total entropy could be as small as $10.83 + 10.34 + 20.25 = 41.42$ (when we assume we can guess the age of the passport holder).

One obvious idea is to include the MRZ optional data field in the list of MRZ items that is used to derive the MRZ access key seed. This would increase the entropy of the MRZ access key seed, especially if this optional data field is filled with random data. Unfortunately some countries already use this field for other purposes. In the Netherlands, for instance, this field stores the social-fiscal number, which is uniquely linked to an individual and not very secret information. In fact, this idea was recently rejected for inclusion in the ICAO standards.

4.2 Traceability

To avoid collisions, contactless smart cards and RFID systems use unique low-level tag identifiers in the radio communication protocol. This is also true for the e-passports. If this identifier is fixed (which is usually the case in RFID tags and contactless smart cards), passports are clearly easily traceable. Note that because this identifier is used in the very first stages of setting up a connection between the passport and the reader, no form of access control or reader authentication can be performed.

Luckily, this anti-collision identifier does not have to be fixed. The number can also be randomly generated each time the passport comes within range of a reader. If the random generator is of sufficient quality (and this is certainly an issue in low-end RFID systems), the passport can no longer be traced through the anti-collision identifier.

However, the anti-collision identifier creates a possible subliminal channel. For instance, instead of simply generating a random number r, the passport could be instructed to generate an anti collision identifier like

$$id = E_{k_{NSA}}(r, passportnumber) \ .$$

The resulting string looks random, because of the randomness of r and the properties of the encryption function. But clearly it can be decrypted by the owner of k_{NSA} to reveal the passport number. Unless the passport chip is reverse engineered, the existence of such a subliminal channel cannot be detected.

Another subliminal channel exists when Active Authentication is used [5]. Recall that active authentication requires the passport to sign a challenge from a reader using its unique private key. Because the challenge is totally determined by the reader, the reader can embed information into this string, which is unknowingly signed by the passport. For instance, the challenge could contain the border crossing location, and the current date and time. A signature adds an extra layer of non-repudiability to the border crossing logs, and can be used to prove this fact to others. The challenge could also contain the passport number of the person verified ahead of you at border inspection, possibly linking you to the person you were travelling with.

Even if all the above issues are addressed, discriminating features of passports remain. Different countries may use different chip suppliers. Later batches of passports will use more advanced technology, or may contain different or additional information[2]. In the future, newer versions of chip operating systems

[2] Indeed, the first passports will be issued without fingerprints.

may be used. All these differences may be noticeable by looking carefully at the behaviour of the chip on the radio channel, at the chip's Answer To Reset (ATR), which is sent in reaction to a reset command by the reader, or at the responses the chip gives (or doesn't give) to specific card commands sent to it. We expect to see large differences in behaviour especially on unintended, unexpected or even unspecified input sent to the card. All these things are possible before BAC has been performed.

Other applications may be put on the passports (see Sect. 6) as well. These applications may even be accessible before BAC has been performed. The set of available applications may actually constitute a narrow profile that identifies a specific set of possible passport holders, and may reveal the place of work, or the banks the passport holder has accounts with.

We conclude that even without access to the MRZ, i.e., in the classic skimming scenario on streets, public transport, etc., passports still leak information that can be traced back to individuals, or groups of individuals.

5 Extended Access Control

Standardisation of the security features and biometrics to be used in European passports has been taken up independently (but of course in accordance with the ICAO standards) by the European Union [7]. In recognition of the fact that biometric information is quite sensitive, the European Union has mandated that such data should be protected by a so-called "Extended Access Control" mechanism. The technical specifications of the European e-passport are drafted by a special EU Committee, founded as a result of Article 6 of Regulation 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas [6].

Public information about the details of Extended Access Control has recently become available [5, 16]. This allows us to discuss certain shortcomings in the schemes under consideration, although we wish to stress that these schemes are a huge improvement over the extremely minimal security features imposed by the ICAO standards.

Extended Access Control consists of two phases, Chip Authentication followed by Terminal Authentication. Chip Authentication performs the same function as Active Authentication in the ICAO standards, i.e., proving the chip is genuine and thus protecting the passport against cloning. It avoids the problems associated with active authentication, like the challenge semantics discussed in the previous section. Chip authentication achieves its task by first exchanging a session key using a Diffie-Hellman key exchange. The chip uses a static key pair for this, the public part of which is part of the logical data structure (LDS) on the chip and thus signed through the security objects SO_D. The terminal uses a fresh key pair for each session. Authenticity of the chip is established once the chip proves that it knows the session key, which happens implicitly when the session key is used successfully to communicate with the chip.

Terminal Authentication aims to prove to the chip that the terminal is allowed to access the data on the chip. This access is granted through a chain of certifi-

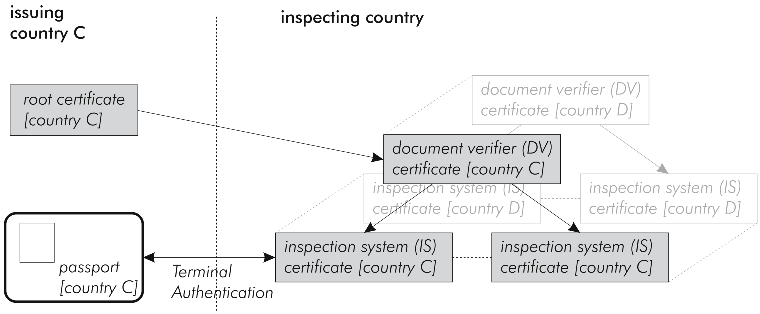

Fig. 3. Extended Access Control certificates

cates, the root of which is the issuer of the passport at hand (see Fig. 3). In other words, the issuer of the passport controls who can access the data on the passport. This root issues Document Verifier (DV) Certificates, one for each country that is granted access to the data on the passport. These DV certificates are used to generate Inspection System (IS) certificates, which can be distributed to inspection systems (e.g., readers/terminals) at border crossings. Each passport issued by a particular country can verify the authenticity of these DV certificates, and hence of the IS certificates issued through these DV certificates. A valid IS certificate grants access to certain data on the chip. All certificates have a limited validity period.

Terminal authentication, as proposed, does have a few weaknesses. First of all, the chip cannot keep time itself, and does not have access to a reliable source of time either. This makes it hard to check whether a certificate has expired or not. This, in turn, makes it practically impossible to revoke a certificate. The problem is the following. A terminal with a valid IS certificate and a valid DV certificate can access the sensitive data on many passports. When such a terminal is stolen, these access rights remain, even when the validity period of these certificates has expired: the chip does not know the correct time, and the terminal does not have to tell it the correct time. This is the case even if certificates have extremely short validity periods, like a single day. We see that one stolen terminal breaks the intended security goal of terminal authentication. Of course, stolen terminals do not make skimming attacks possible: a terminal still needs access to the MRZ in order to perform basic access control. To mitigate the problem somewhat, the standards propose that the chip keeps the most recent date seen on a valid certificate. In other words, the chip advances its idea of the current time each time it passes a border inspection system. This only saves the frequent travellers; people that barely use their passports stay vulnerable for a long time.

Secondly, the certificate hierarchy itself poses a problem. The hierarchy is quite shallow. It does not make it easy to allow access to the biometric data for other applications beyond border inspection, even though such applications are already being discussed today (see also Sect. 6 below). To acquire access, one has to apply for IS certificates at the country DV, or for a DV certificate at each issuing country. The latter would create a huge management overhead, as it would require each country to reliably verify the identity and trustworthiness of the requesting applicant and issue certificates in response. The first makes it impossible for countries to differentiate access rights among different applications, and would make the country DV responsible for the issuing of IS certificates for each and every terminal involved in the new application. This is clearly impractical, if we consider the use of passports for home banking or single sign-on systems that require terminals at each and every PC.

Making the certificate hierarchy larger and more flexible may not be an option. It means the chip has to verify even more certificates before it can grant access. This does put quite a burden on the processing capabilities of the chip, which should guarantee reasonably short transaction times. No one is willing to stand in the queue at border inspection for an even longer amount of time, simply because the new passports contain new, but slow, technology. A different, more flexible, approach is discussed in Sect. 9.

6 New Applications

The new e-passport requires an international infrastructure for biometric verification. This is a huge project, of which the effectiveness and risks are uncertain. The main driving force is political pressure: the logic of politics simply requires high profile action in the face of international terrorism. Once implemented, it inevitably leads to function creep: new possible applications emerge, either spontaneously or via new policy initiatives. We shall discuss two such applications, and speculate about the future.

Once we obtain a new passport with a high-end chip embedded with which we can communicate ourselves (via open standards), we can ask ourselves whether we can also use it for our own purposes. We briefly discuss two options: logon, and digital signatures.

The e-passport can be used to log on to your computer account. For instance, if you give your MRZ (or the associated keys) to your computer or local network, the logon procedure can set up a challenge-response session with your passport: activation of the chip happens via the MRZ, and checking of a signature written by the passport-chip on a challenge generated by your computer can proceed via the public key of the document signer. It allows your computer to check the integrity of the passports security object, which contains the public key corresponding to the private signature-key of your passport.

This authentication procedure only involves "something you have": anyone holding your passport can log in to your machine. You can strengthen the procedure by requiring a usual password, or even a biometric check based on a comparison of facial images (a freshly taken one, and the one on the chip).

You may also wish to use your e-passport to sign documents and emails using the embedded private key for Active Authentication. This is not such a good idea, for two reasons. First of all, the signature is obtained by exploiting the challenge-response mechanism for another purpose. Such interference should be avoided, because a challenge-response at a border inspection could then be misused to trick you into signing a certain document. Secondly, proving your identity after signing requires publication of your MRZ, together with the security object of your passport-chip (which is integrity-protected by a signature of the document signer): this object couples the public key (for your signature) to identifying information such as your name. But releasing the MRZ allows everyone to access your passport, through Basic Access Control.

The underlying problem is that the e-passport was not designed with an embedded useful certificate (such as X.509) for the holder.

Once there is an infrastructure for biometric verification, it becomes natural to ask: why not use it for identification as well? People may loose (willingly or unwillingly) their passport, or may apply for multiple copies, possibly under different names. Indeed, the government of the Netherlands is preparing legislation [1, 2] to set up a central database with biometric information, in order to "increase the effectiveness of national identification laws". Such a central database goes beyond what is required by European directives.

The possibility of biometric identification of the entire (passport-holding) population involves a change of power balance between states and their citizens. Consent or cooperation is then no longer needed for identification. Tracing and tracking of individuals becomes possible on a scale that we have not seen before.

Assuming the biometric passport leads to a reliable infrastructure for verification and identification of individuals, the societal pressure will certainly increase to use it in various other sectors than just border inspection. Such applications are not foreseen—or covered by—European regulations. Interested parties are police and intelligence forces, banks and credit card companies, social security organisations, car rental firms, casinos, etc. Where do we draw the line, if any?

We see that the introduction of the new e-passport is not only a large technical and organisational challenge, but also a societal one. Governments are implicitly asking for acceptance of this new technology. This acceptance question is not so explicit, but is certainly there. If some political action group makes a strong public case against the e-passport, and manages to convince a large part of the population to immediately destroy the embedded chip after issuance—for instance by putting the passport in a microwave—the whole enterprise will fail. The interesting point is that individuals do have decisive power over the use of the chip in their e-passport. Even stronger, such a political action group may decide to build disruptive equipment that can destroy the RFID-chips from some distance, so that passports are destroyed without the holder knowing (immediately). To counter such movements, governments may try to make it sufficiently unattractive or even impossible to cross borders for travellers without a functioning passport. This is only possible, however, if the numbers of broken chips is relatively low. And in any case, it will not improve popularity of the scheme to begin with.

7 Identity Management Issues

Identity management (IM) is about "rules-4-roles": regulation of identification, authentication and authorisation in and between organisations. The new e-passport is part of IM by states. It forms an identification and authentication mechanism that is forced upon citizens, primarily for international movement, but also for internal purposes.

Identification and authentication in everyday life is a negotiation process. When a stranger in the street asks for your biometric data, you will refuse. But you may engage in a conversation, discover mutual interests, and exchange business cards or phone numbers. Upon a next contact more identifying information may be released, possibly leading to a gradual buildup of trust.

The e-passport, in contrast, provides a rigid format. In certain situations it forms an overkill, for instance when you just need to prove that you are over eighteen. When IM goes digital and becomes formalised one would like to have more flexible mechanisms, with individual control via personal policies. In the future we may expect to be carrying identity tokens that flexibly react to the environment. Three basic rules for such systems are:

- The environment should authenticate itself first. For instance, when the environment can prove to be my home, my policy allows my token to release much personal information, for instance about my music preference or health.
- Authentication should be possible in small portions, for instance via certificates or credentials saying "this person is over eighteen", with a signature provided by a relevant authority.
- Automatic recognition of individuals, for instance via an implanted RFID chip that broadcasts your personal (social security) number, is excluded. Privacy is important for personal security—and not, as too often stated, only an impediment to public security.

8 Evaluation of Security Goals

In Sect. 2 we have formulated three security goals that we consider reasonable. In this section we evaluate whether the current system meets these goals.

Readers should identify themselves first. In the usual sense of "authenticated" or "trusted" readers, this goal is not reached. For instance, we managed to write our own terminal application that retrieves the public information like the facial image from the chip. And our reader is not considered trusted. The implemented BAC protocol only assures that the reader has knowledge of the MRZ on the passport. In the European implementation of EAC the reader must authenticate itself and hence this goal is more or less met for the information marked as sensitive, but weaknesses exist (see Sect. 5).

Consent by the passport holders. Theoretically this goal is reached. By use of BAC any terminal that tries to read information first needs to read the MRZ information printed on the inside of the passport. Hence the holder must give his consent for the transaction by opening his passport. However, as we have seen in Sect. 4.2 some subliminal channels exist that may leak information about the card even before BAC has been applied or in other words even before the holder has given his consent.

Proof of integrity and authenticity. The integrity part of this goal is reached by the secure messaging system, which is applied for all communication after BAC. As we have seen in Sect. 4 both commands and responses are encrypted and augmented with a message authentication code to provide integrity and confidentiality. Authenticity of the information is guaranteed through Passive Authentication (see Sect. 4)

9 e-Passport v2

Until now we have discussed several issues with the security and privacy protection of the current proposed standards for biometric passports, from both ICAO and, in particular, the EU. We have argued that protection mechanisms should be improved. However, improvements to such standards are at best incremental, and do not usually challenge the primary design decisions. In fact, such fundamental changes would certainly be backwards incompatible, and require a totally new standard. In our opinion, more fundamental changes are required to really provide strong security and proper privacy protection to the new generation of e-passports.

9.1 Avoiding Contactless Cards

The most fundamental change is to reconsider the choice for a wireless communication interface between the chip in the passport and the terminal at border inspection. Using a wireless interface makes skimming attacks possible. It is exactly the fear of this possibility that has sparked a huge controversy over the current e-passport proposals. Initially, the US passports would not even implement Basic Access Control. Now they are even considering to include metal shields in the cover pages of the passport to function as a Faraday cage, to physically disable the wireless communication link.

But all Basic Access Control really is, is a very elaborate way to achieve exactly the same as what is achieved when inserting a smart card with contacts into the slot of a reader: namely that the holder of the passport allows the owner of the terminal to read the data on the chip. Then, why not simply use smart cards with contacts for the new e-passport? The main arguments against this have been the form-factor of the passport, and the need for a sufficient bandwidth to quickly transmit the biometric data from the card to the terminal. However, identity cards and drivers licenses with dimensions similar to credit cards (ID-1) are already under consideration. And bandwidth concerns are no longer an issue either. Many smart card suppliers already sell smart cards with integrated USB 1.1 interfaces that allow for a much higher throughput, using the original [12] ISO contact module found on the card, and standardisation for this approach is underway [13]. Such a solution would take away all worries associated with using a wireless chip, and would keep the e-passport clear of all discussions surrounding the (perceived) privacy issues with RFID.

9.2 On-Line Terminal Authentication

Once a connection between passport and terminal is established, a decision has to be made regarding the access rights of the terminal and to determine which data on the passport it is allowed to read. Current EU proposals for extended access control are found wanting: stolen terminals cannot be revoked, and the shallow, rigid certificate hierarchy proposed to regulate access does not allow for flexible and/or dynamic access control policies (see Sect. 5). The EU approach was chosen to allow for off-line, mobile terminals, like those that are used by mobile border inspection units. But clearly such mobile terminals can be connected to the network over a wireless link, if only through GPRS, which is the standard on cell phones these days.

If we assume that terminals are always connected to the network, we can use on-line terminal authentication. The general idea is then the following.

Each terminal owns a private/public key pair. Each terminal is used for a particular application. This application is encoded in a certificate C_{AA} that contains the public key K_{TA} of the terminal, and which is signed by the application authority AA. Access rights are associated with application. Each country stores, for each application authority that it wishes to recognise, the access rights for that application. These access rights are stored in the back office. The back office also stores the public keys of all terminals that have been revoked.

On-line terminal authentication then proceeds as follows. First, the terminal sends the certificate C_{AA} (containing its public key K_{TA}) to the chip. The chip and the terminal perform a challenge-response protocol in which the terminal proves to the chip that it owns the private key corresponding to K_{TA}. This establishes the identity of the terminal. Next, the chip sets up an authenticated channel between itself and the back office of the issuing country. It can do so using a country certificate that is stored in the chip during personalisation. The channel should not be vulnerable to replay attacks. It sends C_{AA} (and K_{TA}) to the back-office. There, C_{AA} is verified against the known application authorities (this validates that K_{TA} was certified by such an authority) and K_{TA} is checked against the list of all revoked terminals. If these checks pass, the access rights for AA are sent back to the chip. If not, then the empty set (i.e., no access rights) is sent back to the chip. The chip interprets the access rights it receives and grants access to the terminal accordingly. Because the channel is authentic and does not allow replay attacks, the access rights received by the chip correspond to the certificate it sent to the back office.

With on-line terminal authentication, terminals can be revoked in real-time: as soon as they are marked as revoked in the back offices of the issuing country, no passport of that country will allow that terminal access to its data. Also, the access permissions can be changed dynamically, and can even be based on the exact time the request was made, or on the specific usage pattern of the passport. The general idea can be refined to also allow revocation of terminals by the countries that manage them, instead of requiring them to inform all other countries that a particular terminal should be revoked (because it was stolen, for instance). Also, more levels of certificates can be introduced, to make management of access rights easier.

9.3 Other Improvements

In Sect. 3 we have seen that real pictures are stored on the chip. With an immediate consequence that whoever is able to retrieve these images from the chip, has access to good biometric data, which he can use for identity theft. Using templates that work like a one-way function, it will be possible to check whether the template on the chip matches the template derived from the person who is claiming to be the holder of the passport. This leaking of real biometric data may not seem such a big deal in a time where many pictures are published on the Internet. The point here is that these pictures for the passports are taken under good conditions and hence provides highly accurate biometric information.

The entropy-related off-line attacks discussed in Sect. 4.1 are possible because a guess of MRZ-information directly leads to all keys used in a communication session. These keys can be checked against a transcript of that session to verify the guess. The situation is similar to many password-based authentication and session-setup protocols. Encrypted key exchange protocols, discovered by Bellovin and Merritt [4], do not suffer from this problem. There a low entropy password is used to exchange a high entropy secret that cannot efficiently be guessed using an off-line attack[3]. Using encrypted key exchange protocols for basic access control would strengthen the security of the passport considerably.

In Sect. 6 we have seen that it will be inevitable that other applications want to use the infrastructure available on the chip for other purposes than the original ones. In the current system it is already possible to sign things with a private key, but this causes some unwanted side effects as already described in Sect. 6. In order to prevent this the standards should be rewritten in such a way that at least these additional functions can be used and preferably in a disjoint setting from the border inspection functions. A possible implementation for this could be to have an X.509 certificate included with a public key that has nothing to do with the MRZ or other information needed for the border inspection tasks.

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