

Visas: numbering of visas

2008/0074(CNS) - 24/07/2008 - Final act

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Regulation (EC) No 856/2008 amending Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas.

BACKGROUND: the visa number is an integral part of the uniform format for visa. It is inserted in order to identify the individual visa issued to a third country national by one of the Member States. The number is printed on the sticker during the production process before personalisation in order to identify lost or stolen blank documents. It also serves to register visa stickers in order to control stocks and issued visas.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has set out standards, for machine-readable travel documents and in particular a list of country codes. In accordance with the ICAO standards, the first line of the machine-readable zone must include the 3-letter ICAO country code of the issuing State and the second line the visa number (using nine entry positions).

As the visa number used in the second line of the machine-readable zone is limited to 9 characters, the current visa numbering poses problems. Firstly, Member States interpreted the numbering in their own way, which met the requirements of their own visa sticker production process, but was not fully compliant with both Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 (see [CNS/1994/0163](#)) and ICAO specifications. Consequently the visa number could not be read by machines and had to be entered manually in the system. In addition, other incoherencies further complicated the machine-readable visa system.

Until now these differences were not that important as the visa is only visually inspected at the border or checked by reading the machine-readable zone. However, once the Visa Information System ([VIS](#)) is in place, verification at external border crossing points will in principle be performed using the visa sticker number in combination with the fingerprints of the holder. For the system to work and to be readable by the VIS, a **unique visa number** which is readable in the machine-readable zone is required.

That is the subject of this amending Regulation, which aims to amend the current visa numbering system in order to have a unique visa sticker number.

CONTENT: the Regulation provides that the numbering of the visa sticker, which is printed during the production process, must be adapted to the new requirements of the VIS and its legal basis. The number in the system must be **unique** in order to identify the correct application file against which fingerprints are to be compared during verification.

The amending Regulation provides for a certain number of technical guidelines specifying the security features to be included on the visa. The following information should be included, in accordance with the uniform format laid out in the annex:

- an integrated photograph produced to high security standards;
- an optically variable mark ("kinogram" or equivalent). Depending on the angle of view, 12 stars, the letter "E" and a globe become visible in various sizes and colors;
- the logo consisting of a letter or letters indicating the issuing Member State (or "BNL" in the case of the Benelux countries): "A" for Austria, "BG" for Bulgaria, "BNL" for Benelux, "CY" for Cyprus, "CZE" for the Czech Republic, "D" for Germany, "DK" for Denmark, "E" for Spain, "EST" for

Estonia, "F" for France, "FIN" for Finland, "GR" for Greece, "H" for Hungary, "I" for Italy, "IRL" for Ireland, "LT" for Lithuania, "LVA" for Latvia, "M" for Malta, "P" for Portugal, "PL" for Poland, "ROU" for Romania, "S" for Sweden, "SK" for Slovakia, "SVN" for Slovenia, "UK" for the United Kingdom;

- the word "visa" in capital letters in optically variable coloring. Depending on the angle of view, it shall appear green or red;
- the 9-digit national number of the visa sticker, which shall be pre-printed. A special type shall be used;
- the three-letter country code as set out in ICAO Document 9303 on machine-readable travel documents (except for Germany), indicating the issuing Member State.

The annex to the Regulation also includes a series of technical specifications regarding parts of the visa to be filled in:

- the period of validity of the visa;
- the type of visa (short-stay or long-stay) with information on the number of possible days of validity of the visa;
- the place of issue;
- the date of issue with the passport number;
- the surname and name of the holder;
- remarks (any further information which is considered necessary);
- the relevant machine-readable information to facilitate external border controls and the Member State issuing the document.

The paper shall have a natural colouring with red and blue markings. The words designating the boxes shall appear in English and French. The issuing State may add a third official Community language. However, the word "visa" in the top line may appear in any one official language of the Community.

Territorial provisions: in accordance with the relevant provisions of the treaty, the United Kingdom and Ireland are not participating in the adoption of this Regulation. It applies to Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein insofar as these countries are associated with the Schengen acquis, of which this Regulation forms part.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 22 September 2008. The Regulation shall apply as of 1 May 2009.