

Visa information system VIS: establishment, information exchange between Member States

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This is fourth progress report on the work carried out by the Commission in 2007 (January – December 2007) on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS) in accordance with Article 6 of Council Decision No. 2004/512/EC establishing the Visa Information System (VIS). This decision provides that the Commission, assisted by the SIS II Committee, is responsible for developing the VIS, whereas the national systems shall be adapted and/or developed by the Member States.

To recall, the VIS Project is divided into three phases:

- Phase 1 (Detailed Design): this phase has delivered all the documents necessary to fully describe the VIS from a technical perspective.
- Phase 2 (Development, Testing and Deployment): this phase will develop and deploy the system.
- Phase 3 (Migration and Integration): during this phase Member States will connect their national systems to the VIS central database.

Legal framework for the VIS: in June 2007, **political agreement was achieved** between the European Parliament and the Council on the "VIS legislative package", consisting of the [Regulation](#) concerning the Visa Information System (VIS) and the exchange of data between Member States on short-stay visas (VIS Regulation) and a third pillar Council [Decision](#). The regulation and decision constitute a **single legislative package**.

The **VIS Regulation** defines the purpose and functionalities of the VIS and the responsibilities for this system. It also establishes conditions and procedures for the exchange of data between Member States on applications for short-stay visas and on the decisions taken in relation thereto. The data to be processed in the VIS shall include alphanumeric data, photographs and fingerprints of the visa applicant, in order to ensure reliable verification and identification.

The **VIS Decision** concerns access for consultation of the Visa Information System (VIS) by designated authorities of Member States and by Europol for the purposes of the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences and of other serious criminal offences.

The break-through achieved by the political agreement on the legal framework for the VIS provided the clarity needed to allow re-scheduling to go ahead.

Main progress made throughout 2007:

Rescheduling the VIS: the original VIS schedule indicated that the VIS would go live in March 2007, but with only 6 Member States, each connecting to at least one consulate, without biometrics. This was based on the assumption that the legal framework for the VIS would be adopted in the summer of 2006. The revised schedule was presented in September 2007, which into account all requirements of the legal basis. It states that the Central VIS is due to be ready for operations by the **end of May 2009**.

Development of the Central System: the target was to have the central system developed and tested by the end of 2006. This was not possible due to the fact that political agreement had not yet been reached at that time on the VIS Regulation. At the start of 2007, there was no clear indication of the likely timing for adoption. Pending the political agreement on the VIS Regulation, reached subsequently, in June 2007, the

Commission services decided to pursue a pro-active approach, continuing development of the VIS on the basis of the current proposal.

Development of the Biometric Matching System: the original VIS development schedule specified that the inclusion of the biometric components of the system (the Biometric Matching System - BMS) would only take place after the implementation of the alphanumeric part of the system. However, on 24 February 2005, the JHA Council requested that the VIS become operational with biometric functionalities from the onset. Preparations for subsequent testing (including tools) are in progress. There will be various phases of tests both at central level and in collaboration with the Member States.

Network: the scope of the VIS project includes the provision of a wide area communications network (WAN) between the National Interface in each Member State and the Central VIS to allow the national and central systems to communicate. This network satisfies requirements for availability, security, geographical coverage and service level. The contract for the s-TESTA network was awarded in 2006 to a consortium comprising OBS (Orange Business Services) and HP (Hewlett-Packard). At the end of 2007, after agreement of the revised global schedule for VIS, the Commission services revised the scheduling of network delivery. The network contractor agreed to install the network for all Member States by 30 June 2008. The **adoption of a Commission decision** laying down the architecture and requirements of the National Interfaces and of the communication infrastructure between the Central VIS and the National Interfaces is **scheduled for 2008**.

Budget: commitment appropriations in the 2007 general budget amounted to EUR 32 million. The main components of expenditure during 2007 were site preparation, the network, preparation of biometrics (additional features), security audit, external assistance for project management, audit and evaluation, running costs for the development phase, studies and changes to the VIS (due to developments with the legal texts). 73.35% of the total VIS appropriations had been committed and 69.30% of payment appropriations had been paid by the end of the reporting period. The delay in agreement on the legal framework triggered a delay with certain commitments. These developments also subsequently impacted on the implementation of certain payment appropriations in 2007. Commitment appropriations of EUR 20 million have been secured for the next reporting period.

Conclusion: the report concludes that 2007 was characterised by the political agreement on the legal framework which allowed the rescheduling of the project and clarification of the development work needed for incorporation of the BMS into the VIS. The political agreement on the legal framework in mid-2007 enabled good progress to be made with development, building on the pro-active work carried out in the first half of the year on the basis of the previous versions of the legal proposals.

At the end of the reporting period, the project remained fully on track with the revised schedule finalised in September 2007.

With regard to financial matters, certain commitments were suspended in the first half of the year, pending the political agreement on the legal framework in June 2007. From that time onwards, efforts were made to move ahead as efficiently and effectively as possible with financial implementation. This resulted in positive year end figures for both commitments and payments. Communication with Member States remained excellent and relationships were strengthened within the working group meetings.