

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

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This is a report on the work carried out by the Commission in **2008** on the development of the Visa Information System (**VIS**). It is the fifth progress report presented by the Commission in accordance with Article 6 of Council Decision 2004/512/EC establishing the Visa Information System (VIS).

Main progress made throughout 2008:

Legal framework for the VIS: in June 2007, political agreement was achieved between the European Parliament and the JHA Council on the "VIS legislative package. The legal instruments were only formally adopted in June 2008, after two parliamentary reservations were lifted. The instruments are as follows: [Regulation \(EC\) 767/2008](#) 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 2008 /633/JHA](#) on the 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.

Rescheduling the VIS: according to the revised schedule agreed in September 2007, taking into account all technical changes to be made to the central system resulting from the adoption of the legal basis, the Central VIS was due to be ready for operations in June 2009. Work towards this deadline continued throughout the reporting period and this schedule was strictly followed and nearly all milestones were achieved in accordance with the agreed plan. During discussions with Member States experts in the VIS National Project Managers and at the Change Management Board, Member States submitted a number of requests for changes that would impact the development of the VIS and BMS and require an update of technical specifications. In November, the CMB recommended implementing these changes before the VIS becomes operational and the SIS II Committee agreed this approach. Since the changes would impact the development of the VIS by six months as assessed by the Main Development Contractor, the recommendations of the CMB and SIS II Committee were forwarded to the "Friends of VIS" group for discussion and orientation. In their first meeting in December, the group confirmed the Member States' unanimous desire to implement these changes before VIS begins operations. During their last meeting in 2008, the COREPER asked the Commission to prepare a detailed updated schedule for the VIS, which would include the above-mentioned changes and move the date of operations **to the end of 2009**.

Development of the Central System: development of several iterations of main deliverables and many testing deliverables continued throughout the reporting period.

Development of the Biometric Matching System (BMS): after political agreement was achieved between the Council and European Parliament on the VIS Regulation and the related Decision, the Main Development Contractor conducted an analysis of the system development work needed to ensure that VIS is fully compatible with the legal framework and that it can interface with the BMS. The suspension of the BMS contract was lifted on 1 April, after which the BMS environment was connected to VIS in order to carry out the Factory Acceptance Test (FAT). Software kits for biometric functionalities were also immediately delivered to Member States. During the year, Member States received software kits for use in their fingerprint capture devices and made use of the BMS web portal for their national biometric implementation. In 2008 several visits were made by a number of invited groups to the BMS Showcase/Demonstrator which simulates the use of VIS at consular posts and at border-crossing points. Member States delegations, Members of the European Parliament and Commission Vice- President Barrot with

members of his Cabinet were shown the practical aspects and workflow of biometric visa applications in a mock-up setting. Draft implementing measures laying down the technical specifications for the resolution and use of fingerprints for biometric identification and verification complementing the minimum specifications set by Commission Decision 2006/648/EC were prepared in 2008. They are due to be discussed in the SISVIS Committee in 2009.

Network: the VIS Central Unit and Backup Central Unit were installed at both sites in Strasbourg (France) and St. Johann im Pongau (Austria) in February. The connection between the Central Unit and Backup Central Unit was made on 1 April, ahead of the expected contractual deadline. Installation of the hardware at both sites started as planned and was finalised at the end of July.

Network installation was launched in January 2008. All 48 site visits were completed by March and the delivery of circuits continued throughout the spring, although six sites were placed on hold at the request of Member States until the end of the year. The network installation was fully completed by the end of June as planned for all Member States' sites except for four main sites and five backup sites, mostly due to the lack of room readiness.

Testing: major preparations for testing Central VIS and for tests with Member States that will start in early 2009 took place during the reporting period. At the end of the reporting period, six operational systems test (OST) countries had basic connectivity and were preparing to perform application connectivity tests. Three OST Member States had successfully completed their Compliance Tests by the end of 2008. In parallel, the functional tests of the system solution tests (SST) had begun, followed by performance tests. Following the approval of the change requests, some of the testing phases will be rescheduled. A second iteration of the System Solution Tests (SST) will be carried out after the requested changes have been implemented, followed immediately by the OST and concluding with the provisional system acceptance Test (PSAT), with a view to **declaring the VIS ready for operations in late December 2009**.

Roll-out to consular posts and border crossing points: according to the draft amendment of the Common Consular Instructions, Member States shall collect biometric identifiers comprising the facial image and ten fingerprints from visa applicants at their consular posts. In preparation for rollout to consular posts, the pilot project for the capture, storage and verification of biometric data from visa applicants (BIODEV II) has continued to run throughout the reporting period and has in fact been extended until the end of March 2009.

According to the amended Schengen Borders Code, Member States should be ready to use the VIS at all external border crossing points for verifications against the VIS of all visa holders twenty days after VIS goes live in the first consular region. Council Conclusions under the UK Presidency defined that the **first consular region shall be North Africa** and that VIS rollout thereafter should be completed over the course of two years in determined regions, the order of which is to be determined in comitology.

Budget: the total commitment appropriations in the 2008 general budget amounted to EUR 20 million, of which EUR 2 million were put into the reserve. The main components of expenditure during 2008 were the preparation of additional features for biometrics, external assistance for project management and quality assurance, exploitation costs for the development phase, and changes to the VIS (due to developments with the legal texts and Member State change requests). 88.21% of the total VIS appropriations were committed and 95.13% of payment appropriations had been paid by the end of the reporting period.

Conclusion: the report concludes that 2008 was characterised by the implementation of the new schedule based on the analysis of the adopted legal framework and performance of the work needed to incorporate the Biometric Matching System (BMS) into the VIS. Finalising the technical specifications of the system and preparation of the testing deliverables comprised the bulk of the effort during the reporting period.

Moreover, the Factory Acceptance Tests were carried out and accepted and preparations for compliance testing with Member States were underway. Cooperation with Member States at political level was also strengthened further through the establishment of the Friends of VIS.

In addition, the schedule for the VIS approved in 2007 was maintained at central level and could have been achieved if the unanimous request by Member States for the implementation of four changes had not emerged towards the end of the year. These changes have required an extension of the deadline for operations by six months. The report notes that all stakeholders are closely working together towards achieving this goal in 2009.