

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

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In accordance with Council Decision 2004/512/EC establishing the Visa Information System (**VIS**), the Commission presents to the Council and the European Parliament the seventh progress report on the development of the VIS. The report covers the work carried out by the Commission between January and December 2010.

Its main conclusions may be summarised as follows:

Main progress in the period assessed (2010): the year was characterised by the successful completion of the second major testing phase of the central system (System Solutions Tests or SST) and the start of the third phase (the Operational System Tests or OST) involving seven Member States. At national level, most Member States have made significant progress with the development of their national systems throughout the year. At the end of the reporting period, all countries report that they will be ready to connect to the VIS by June 2011. Intensive monitoring will therefore continue in 2011 as well as "on-site" visits to consular posts in the first region of deployment to monitor the administrative preparations by Member States.

Following the successful completion of the SST, testing of the system with the involvement of Member States began in August 2010 and was still ongoing as of the end of the reporting period. Due to this shift in the planning of tests, the December 2010 target date for the start of operations of the VIS could no longer hold. A revised schedule leading to the start of operations in June 2011 was communicated to the JHA Council on 7 October 2010 and to the European Parliament.

Rescheduling the VIS: the late yet successful completion of the SST inevitably led the Commission and Member States to reassess the global project schedule. This exercise was carried out on the basis of a realistic assessment of both the ability of the Commission's contractor to deliver the central system and the readiness of Member States to prepare their national deployment at consulates and external borders. It also includes some margin in case new, unforeseen issues arise.

The following new global schedule was communicated to the JHA Council on 7 October 2010 and to the European Parliament;

- Operational System Tests (OST): 23 August 2010 – 14 February 2011
- Provisional System Acceptance Tests (PSAT): 23 March 2011 – 15 June 2011
- Central system readiness for operations: 24 June 2011.

At the end of the reporting period, the project is in line with the new global schedule.

Planning and budget: the total available commitment appropriations for the VIS in 2010 amounted to EUR 30.3 million. Due to the delays encountered during the SST, parts of the project activities originally planned for 2010 were postponed to 2011, resulting in a corresponding shift of commitments: 63.06% of the total VIS appropriations were committed and 85.10% of payment appropriations had been paid by the end of the reporting period. A recovery order for the contractual penalties of EUR 7.6 million for the delays incurred by the SST in 2009 was issued in March 2010.

Risk Management: at the end of 2010, the most critical risks identified were the following: (i) delay in completing the Operational System Tests according to the revised schedule, (ii) Member States' preparations for their participation in the Provisional System Acceptance Tests, (iii) delays in some Member States with consular and border preparations for the start of operations and (iv) delays in Operational Management preparations.

For all risks, mitigation actions are identified and the Commission, Member States, and the Main Development Contractor work closely together to limit the impact of these risks on the overall project.

Member States' National Planning: apart from the availability of the central VIS, the key dependency for the system becoming operational is the progress of national projects. The state of progress varies between Member States, but all Member States consistently reported their progress as being on time to achieve the targeted milestones.

As regards **compliance testing** with Member States and development of most national systems, the VIS project made further progress during the reporting period. By the end of the reporting period, 23 out of 25 current Member States and Schengen countries had completed their compliance tests as initially planned.

Compliance tests remain to be executed only by a few participating countries which have been allocated slots for this purpose in the first part of 2011.

In order to assess the **consular preparations** in North Africa, which is the first region of deployment North Africa, a mission to Cairo took place in December 2010. The purpose of the mission was to obtain "on-site" information about the level of preparedness in Member State consulates, especially as regards their capacity to collect and transmit biometric data of visa applicants to the VIS. It appeared that technical training sessions and communication efforts need to be intensified. For this reason, missions of this type will be further organised in 2011 in other cities throughout North Africa.

The Commission has kept the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament informed on a regular basis regarding the development and state of play of the VIS project and will continue to do so in the future.