

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

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In accordance with Article 6 of Council Decision 2004/512/EC establishing the Visa Information System, the Commission has prepared this ninth and final report on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS).

The report covers the work carried out by the Commission between January and December **2012**. The following is a summary of the progress made during the period under review:

1. Final System Acceptance: the Final System Acceptance (FSA) is a milestone foreseen in the contract signed in 2005 between the Hewlett-Packard Steria (HPS) consortium and the Commission. The FSA is agreed when the contractor is considered to have completed the development of the system and is released from its contractual obligations in the project development. This was granted, as per the contract, after five consecutive months of operations without incident, in August 2012. This important step marks the end of the development of the system in the sense of Council Decision 2004/512/EC and therefore the end of the yearly progress reports referred to in its Article 6.

2. Regional roll-out: during the reporting period, the VIS was successfully deployed in two more geographical regions, the Near East and the Gulf region. For both regions, all Member States notified the Commission of their readiness to connect to the system in due time. The successful and incident-free deployment of VIS in these regions covering 14 countries indicates that the system has matured to a very satisfactory level and that it can sustain operations in subsequent regions.

3. VIS Mail Communication Mechanism: the VIS Mail Communication Mechanism allows for the transmission of messages between Member States using the VIS network infrastructure. During the reporting period, work was focused on preparing the so-called “Phase 2” of the VIS Mail, which will replace the Schengen consultation network (VISION system, under Council management) once the worldwide deployment of the VIS is completed. Phase 2 will add new categories of messages already exchanged under Phase 1, which is operational from 11 October 2011. In 2012, the technical specifications were stabilised and the tests to be run in 2013 were defined. Before the VIS Mail Phase 2 file was handed over to eu-LISA ([the EU Agency for large-scale IT systems](#)), the test plan and the test detailed descriptions were approved by the Member States.

4. Development of the Biometric Matching System (BMS): the Biometric Matching System (BMS) became operational together with the VIS, on 11 October 2011. The BMS, which provides fingerprint matching services to the VIS, was granted Final System Acceptance in March 2012 after 5 months of operations without incident. During the reporting period, BMS has seen the quality of fingerprints steadily increase, stabilising to an overall Failure To Enrol (FTE) rate of around 4%. At the beginning of 2012, the overall FTE was still around 16%. Member States continued to use the software kits provided by the BMS contractor for their fingerprint capturing devices. The majority of fingerprints were submitted by France, Germany, Italy and Spain. A number of participating countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, The Netherlands, Poland, and Switzerland) have also started verifying fingerprints at border crossing points. Member States have not opted to reduce this transitional period to one year for air borders. Switzerland and Sweden have started searching VIS/BMS with fingerprints from asylum seekers.

5. Contract for the Maintenance of the VIS under Working Order and Evolutive Maintenance (MWO/EM): to cater for the technical maintenance of the VIS under working conditions and to improve

the performance of the system over time, taking into account the increasing amount of data that will be inserted in the VIS in the coming years, the Commission launched a call for tender for the "Maintenance in Working Order (MWO) and the Evolutive Maintenance (EM)" of VIS in July 2011. The contract was awarded in August 2012 and the contractor had fully taken over VIS from the incumbent contractor by the end of the reporting period.

6. Handover to the EU IT Agency “eu-LISA”: eu-LISA took over the operational responsibility of VIS from the Commission on 1 December 2012. During a transitional phase, a service contract between the European Commission and France allows the French authorities in Strasbourg (C.SIS) to assist with the operation of the VIS while eu-LISA gradually takes over. The Commission was heavily involved in the handover of both the VIS and BMS projects to eu-LISA at the end of the reporting period in terms of training and shadowing.

7. Statistics: as of 22 November 2012, the VIS had successfully processed close to 1.9 million visa applications, of which 1.5 million resulted in Schengen visas issued, while close to 235 000 visas were refused. The central system had dealt with almost forty million operations received from consulates around the world and border crossing points. These figures concern the use of VIS in the three regions where the system has been rolled out, plus the consulates where Member States have started using the VIS ahead of a pre-determined date. The production of statistical data has since been transferred to eu-LISA.