

Uniform format for visas: security

2015/0134(COD) - 24/06/2015 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EC) laying down a uniform format for visas.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas took over the design adopted by the Schengen states and sets out in its recitals that these documents have to contain all the necessary information and **meet very high technical standards**, notably as regards safeguards against counterfeiting and falsification.

Since the introduction of the uniform format for visas, two substantial modifications to the initial Regulation have been adopted, which have contributed to the issuance of secure documents, fulfilling very high technical standards:

- the first amendment was introduced with Regulation (EC) No 334/2002 integrating a photograph produced according to high security standards as a first step towards the use of elements establishing a more reliable link between the visa sticker and the holder;
- the second amendment with Regulation (EC) No 856/2008 related primarily to an adaptation of the numbering in order to comply with the requirements of the Visa Information System (VIS).

With the above mentioned modifications, high quality counterfeits have recently been detected in several Member States. It is therefore necessary to develop a new security concept with **better security features for the visa sticker**. The new common design should be established with more modern security features to render the visa sticker more secure and prevent forgery. For those reasons a physical document for the visa sticker will still be necessary for years to come.

CONTENT: Council Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laid down a uniform format for visas. The current visa sticker, which has been in circulation for 20 years, has to be considered as compromised in view of serious incidents of counterfeiting and fraud.

Therefore, a new common model with more modern security features is proposed in order to render the visa sticker more secure and prevent forgery.

The technical specifications for the production of the visa sticker are laid down in the new Annex to the amended Regulation. There are no substantive changes to the enacting term of this Regulation, only the Annex is replaced to show the image and the general description of the new visa sticker. The Annex to Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 is replaced by the text in the Annex to this Regulation.

Transition period: to allow for using up existing stocks, a transitional period of six months is foreseen within which Member States can still use the old visa stickers. Moreover, in relation to the current visa sticker, further improvement of the overall security is necessary, without increasing the costs for the document itself.

Territorial provisions: specific measures are laid down in the proposal for the implementation of the proposal by Ireland and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 is part of the

Schengen acquis to which Norway and Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein are associated on the basis of their respective Association Agreements, the proposed amendment should also apply to them.