Residence permits: uniform format, biometric identifiers

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The Council, pending the opinion of the European Parliament, reached a **general approach** on the two draft proposals laying down a uniform format for visas and for residence permits for third country nationals. The Council:

- confirms that the specifications for the enrolment of biometric identifiers in the Visa Information System (VIS) will be coherent and therefore in line with the specifications laid down for biometric data in the Regulation concerning a uniform format for visas;

- considers in agreement with the Commission that the implementation of the proposal on a uniform format for visas requires an additional legal instrument, creating the obligation and specifying the exceptions to the recording of fingerprints on the storage medium of the uniform format for visas;

- invites the Commission to present the relevant proposal on the amendment of the Common Consular Instructions;

- invites the Commission assisted by the Committee created under Article 6 of Regulation 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas to start as soon as possible with the development of the technical specifications necessary for the implementation of the measures.

The Council took note of the Commission’s intention to present a proposal for biometric identifiers in passports before the end of the year. It is recalled that the Commission had been requested to prepare these two proposals by the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003. The main objectives of the proposals are to bring forward the final date for implementation of the photograph from 2007 to 2005 and to require Member States' harmonised integration of biometric identifiers into the visa and the residence permit for third-country nationals in order to ensure interoperability.

In October 2003, the Brussels European Council called upon the JHA Council to reach political agreement by the end of 2003 on the two proposals.