

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

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The Visa Information System will be a system for the exchange of visa data between Member States and thus primarily an instrument to support the common visa policy. It will also facilitate checks at the external borders and within the Member States, the application of the 'Dublin' Regulation determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application, and the identification and return of illegal immigrants. The VIS shall be composed of a European central database, which will be connected to the national systems to enable consulates and other competent authorities of the Member States to enter and consult data on visa applications and the decisions taken thereon.

On 8 June 2004, the Council adopted a first legal instrument for the legal framework of the VIS, Council Decision 2004/512/EC establishing the Visa Information System (VIS). This instrument constitutes the required legal basis to allow for the inclusion in the budget of the European Communities of the necessary appropriations for the development of VIS and the execution of that part of the budget. It also defines the architecture of the VIS and gives the Commission the mandate to develop the VIS on the technical level, assisted by the SIS II committee, whereas the national systems shall be adapted and/or developed by the Member States.

Article 6 of the Council Decision states that the Commission will submit an annual progress report to the Council and the European Parliament concerning the development of the Visa Information System by the end of every year, and for the first time by the end of 2004.

This first Report aims at providing a description of the work carried out by Commission services during 2004 and to outline the next steps.

The main activities carried out in 2004 included:

- the adoption of a proposal for a second legal instrument – a Regulation of the EP and of the Council concerning the VIS and the exchange of data between Member States on short-stay visas;
- an Extended Impact Assessment on the VIS was carried out within the Commission services most concerned and presented to the EP and the Council as an Annex to the above-mentioned proposal.
- Financial activities: the legislative financial statement that accompanied the first legal instrument foresees a total of 30 million EUR for commitment up to 2006, for the development of step 1 of the VIS - processing of alphanumeric data and photographs.
- Commission project organisation – a VIS Project Management Board was set up to involve interested Commission services on a regular basis and in a structured way on the progress of the VIS project.
- Contract for the technical design, development and deployment of SIS II and VIS was awarded.
- The SIS II Committee adopted the Commission services' proposal to create SIS and VIS working groups in which technical discussions on proposed draft implementing measures will take place.
- A risk analysis log is updated on a regular basis and discussed within the Project Management Board and the SIS II Committee.
- A SIS II/VIS connectivity study was commissioned in April 2004.
- Subject to a favourable opinion of the SIS II Committee, the s-TESTA network could be used for the VIS communication infrastructure.
- A call for tender was launched for the selection of a contractor to assist the Commission with the acceptance procedure and in-depth quality checks of SIS II/VIS project deliverables.
- National preparations in the Member States need to be monitored and coordinated by Commission services (formal meetings of the SIS II Committee, informal Member States Expert Meetings, etc.).