Basic information

2008/0074(CNS) CNS - Consultation procedure Regulation	Procedure completed
Visas: numbering of visas Amending Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 1994/0163(CNS) **Subject** 7.10.04 External borders crossing and controls, visas	

Key players

European Parliament	**Committee responsible**	**Rapporteur**	**Appointed**
	LIBE Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs	DEPREZ Gérard (ALDE)	28/05/2008
Council of the European Union	**Council configuration**	**Meetings**	**Date**
	Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)	2887	2008-07-24
European Commission	**Commission DG**	**Commissioner**	
	Justice and Consumers	BARROT Jacques	

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
14/04/2008	Legislative proposal published	COM(2008)0188	Summary
20/05/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
25/06/2008	Vote in committee		Summary
26/06/2008	Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading	A6-0268/2008	
08/07/2008	Decision by Parliament	T6-0324/2008	Summary
08/07/2008	Results of vote in Parliament		
24/07/2008	Act adopted by Council after consultation of Parliament		
24/07/2008	End of procedure in Parliament		
02/09/2008	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2008/0074(CNS)
Procedure type	CNS - Consultation procedure
Procedure subtype	Legislation
Legislative instrument	Regulation
Amendments and repeals	Amending Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 1994/0163(CNS)
Legal basis	EC Treaty (after Amsterdam) EC 062-p2-ab-iii
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	LIBE/6/61758

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE407.889	13/06/2008	
Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading		A6-0268/2008	26/06/2008	
Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading		T6-0324/2008	08/07/2008	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Legislative proposal	COM(2008)0188	14/04/2008	Summary

Additional information

Source	Document	Date
National parliaments	IPEX	
European Commission	EUR-Lex	

Final act

Regulation 2008/0856
OJ L 235 02.09.2008, p. 0001 Summary

Visas: numbering of visas

2008/0074(CNS) - 24/07/2008 - Final act

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Regulation (EC) No 856/2008 amending Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas.

BACKGROUND: the visa number is an integral part of the uniform format for visa. It is inserted in order to identify the individual visa issued to a third country national by one of the Member States. The number is printed on the sticker during the production process before personalisation in order to identify lost or stolen blank documents. It also serves to register visa stickers in order to control stocks and issued visas.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has set out standards, for machine-readable travel documents and in particular a list of country codes. In accordance with the ICAO standards, the first line of the machine-readable zone must include the 3-letter ICAO country code of the issuing State and the second line the visa number (using nine entry positions).

As the visa number used in the second line of the machine-readable zone is limited to 9 characters, the current visa numbering poses problems. Firstly, Member States interpreted the numbering in their own way, which met the requirements of their own visa sticker production process, but was not fully compliant with both Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 (see CNS/1994/0163) and ICAO specifications. Consequently the visa number could not be read by machines and had to be entered manually in the system. In addition, other incoherencies further complicated the machine-readable visa system.

Until now these differences were not that important as the visa is only visually inspected at the border or checked by reading the machine-readable zone. However, once the Visa Information System (VIS) is in place, verification at external border crossing points will in principle be performed using the visa sticker number in combination with the fingerprints of the holder. For the system to work and to be readable by the VIS, a **unique visa number** which is readable in the machine-readable zone is required.

That is the subject of this amending Regulation, which aims to amend the current visa numbering system in order to have a unique visa sticker number.

CONTENT: the Regulation provides that the numbering of the visa sticker, which is printed during the production process, must be adapted to the new requirements of the VIS and its legal basis. The number in the system must be **unique** in order to identify the correct application file against which fingerprints are to be compared during verification.

The amending Regulation provides for a certain number of technical guidelines specifying the security features to be included on the visa. The following information should be included, in accordance with the uniform format laid out in the annex:

- an integrated photograph produced to high security standards;
- an optically variable mark ("kinegram" or equivalent). Depending on the angle of view, 12 stars, the letter "E" and a globe become visible in various sizes and colors;
- the logo consisting of a letter or letters indicating the issuing Member State (or "BNL" in the case of the Benelux countries): “A” for Austria, “BG” for Bulgaria, “BNL” for Benelux, “CY” for Cyprus, “CZE” for the Czech Republic, “D” for Germany, “DK” for Denmark, “E” for Spain, “EST” for Estonia, “F” for France, “FIN” for Finland, “GR” for Greece, “H” for Hungary, “I” for Italy, “IRL” for Ireland, “LT” for Lithuania, “LVA” for Latvia, “M” for Malta, “P” for Portugal, “PL” for Poland, “ROU” for Romania, “S” for Sweden, “SK” for Slovakia, “SVN” for Slovenia, “UK” for the United Kingdom;
- the word "visa" in capital letters in optically variable coloring. Depending on the angle of view, it shall appear green or red;
- the 9-digit national number of the visa sticker, which shall be pre-printed. A special type shall be used;
- the three-letter country code as set out in ICAO Document 9303 on machine-readable travel documents (except for Germany), indicating the issuing Member State.

The annex to the Regulation also includes a series of technical specifications regarding parts of the visa to be filled in:

- the period of validity of the visa;
- the type of visa (short-stay or long-stay) with information on the number of possible days of validity of the visa;
- the place of issue;
- the date of issue with the passport number;
- the surname and name of the holder;
- remarks (any further information which is considered necessary);
- the relevant machine-readable information to facilitate external border controls and the Member State issuing the document.

The paper shall have a natural colouring with red and blue markings. The words designating the boxes shall appear in English and French. The issuing State may add a third official Community language. However, the word "visa" in the top line may appear in any one official language of the Community.

Territorial provisions: in accordance with the relevant provisions of the treaty, the United Kingdom and Ireland are not participating in the adoption of this Regulation. It applies to Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein insofar as these countries are associated with the Schengen acquis, of which this Regulation forms part.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 22 September 2008. The Regulation shall apply as of 1 May 2009.

Visas: numbering of visas

2008/0074(CNS) - 08/07/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 625 votes to 19 with 39 abstentions, under the consultation procedure, a legislative resolution approving the proposal for a Council regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas. The report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Gérard **DEPREZ** (ALDE, BE) on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

Visas: numbering of visas

2008/0074(CNS) - 14/04/2008 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to amend Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas as regards the numbering of visas.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Regulation.

BACKGROUND: the visa number is an integral part of the uniform format for visa. It is inserted in order to identify the individual visa issued to a third country national by one of the Member States. The number is printed on the sticker during the production process before personalisation in order to identify lost or stolen blank documents. It also serves to register visa stickers in order to control stocks and issued visas.

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) has set out standards, for machine-readable travel documents and in particular a list of country codes. In accordance with the ICAO standards, the first line of the machine-readable zone must include the 3-letter ICAO country code of the issuing State and the second line the visa number (using nine entry positions). The uniform format for visas has to be machine-readable and therefore ICAO compliant, in order to speed up the control process at the border.

As the visa number used in the second line of the machine-readable zone is limited to 9 characters, some problems occurred in the past with the current visa numbering. Firstly, Member States interpreted the numbering in their own way (some using more than 9 characters which could not fit into the machine-readable zone and was therefore only partly filled in), which met the requirements of their own visa sticker production process, but was not fully compliant with both Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 (see CNS/1994/0163) and ICAO specifications. Consequently the visa number could not be read by machines and had to be entered manually in the system or could not even be retrieved. In addition, other incoherencies further complicated the machine-readable visa system.

Until now these differences were not that important as the visa is only visually inspected at the border or checked by reading the machine-readable zone. However, once the Visa Information System (VIS) is in place, verification at external border crossing points will in principle be performed using the visa sticker number in combination with the fingerprints of the holder. The VIS will retrieve the relevant application file for this visa from the visa sticker number and will then verify whether the fingerprints of the person presenting the visa at the border match those entered by the consular post in the application file. In the majority of cases, the request to the VIS will be introduced by reading of the machine-readable zone of the visa. The VIS has therefore to rely on a unique visa number, which is a coherent number printed on the visa sticker and in the machine-readable zone.

Consequently, it is necessary to change the current numbering of visas in order to have a unique visa sticker number thus avoiding several visa records coming up during the verification process, instead of the only relevant application file.

This is the subject of this proposal.

CONTENT: the proposed regulation recommends that the numbering of the visa sticker, which is printed during the production process, must be adapted to the new requirements of the VIS and its legal basis. The visa sticker number in the system must be unique in order to identify the correct application file against which fingerprints are to be compared during verification.

In this context, the proposal aims to amend Regulation (EC) No 1683/95 in order to:

- provide for all the technical modifications in order to allow for the planned change of the serial numbering on the visa sticker;
- provide for amendments to Regulation (EC) No 334/2002 in order to align the sticker of the uniform format for visas (see CNS/2001/0232) with the new visa sticker as planned by this proposal;
- describe the overall implementation framework: the VIS should be ready to operate in May 2009 and will go live thereafter once Member States have confirmed they have made the necessary arrangements. For this reason, it is proposed that this regulation enters into force on 1 May 2009, notwithstanding that the stocks of visa stickers can be used up in regions not yet linked to the VIS.

After the adoption of this Regulation, the Commission will proceed as soon as possible with the establishment of the required technical specifications so that the decision can be taken in due time. The technical specifications will adapt the uniform format as required by placing the country code in a space directly under the national visa number.