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ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM (VIS)

2006 Progress Report

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ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM (VIS)

2006 Progress Report

(submitted to the European Parliament and the Council in response to the obligation of Article 6 of the Council Decision No. 2004/512/EC of 8 June 2004)

1. INTRODUCTION

This is a progress report on the work carried out by the Commission in 2006 on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS).

It is the third report¹ presented by the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament in accordance with Article 6 of Council Decision No. 2004/512/EC of 8 June 2004 on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS)².

In this decision, the Council has mandated responsibility for developing VIS to the Commission, assisted by the SIS II Committee³ composed of representatives of the Member States, whereas the national systems shall be adapted and/or developed by the Member States.

2. PROJECT STATUS

2.1. Progress during the period under review

The VIS Project is divided into three phases. Phase 1 (Detailed Design) will deliver all the documents necessary to fully describe the VIS from a technical perspective. The system will be developed and deployed during phase 2 (Development, Testing and Deployment). Finally, during phase 3 (Migration and Integration), Member States will connect their national systems to the VIS central database. The project closed phase 1 during the current reporting period, and phase 2 was commenced. The Biometric Matching System (BMS) call for tender procedure was completed and a contract awarded to a consortium led by Accenture and SAGEM was signed on 14 December. The BMS, having a Service Oriented Architecture, will be linked to the VIS at first and provide the biometric matching services for the system.

2.1.1. Development of Central System

The target was to have the central system developed and tested by the end of 2006. This was not possible due to the ongoing negotiations in the co-decision procedure on the VIS Regulation, which *inter alia* defines the purpose, the functionalities and responsibilities for the VIS.

¹ For the second report see the Commission staff working paper of 10 May 2006 on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS), SEC (2006) 610.

² OJ L 213 of 15.6.2004, p. 5.

³ Set-up by Article 5 (1) of Regulation No 2424/2001 (OJ L 328, 13.12.2001, p. 4)

This year, the main development contractor produced the following set of deliverables which define the system to be developed, effectively closing phase 1 of the project:

- Interface Control Document (ICD). The ICD describes how Member States can connect to and use the VIS. Member States unanimously agreed in 2005 that the version 1.5 of the ICD was sufficient to continue work on their national implementations, and this release was therefore accepted by the Commission.
- Security deliverables. The three security deliverables (Protection Profile, Security Plan and Risk Analysis) were all agreed and accepted in January 2006. Other Phase 1 deliverables relating to procedures for submitting and accepting change requests and deliverables, including the Project Change Management Plan (comprising the Configuration Management Plan), and the Draft Acceptance Plan were also accepted during this period.
- Version 2.3 of the Training, Helpdesk and Support Plan was accepted in April of the current reporting period. Parts 1 and 2 of the Business Continuity Plan were also accepted later that month.
- The last release of the Migration and Integration Plan was accepted in November. Version 1.8 of the Test Plan was accepted in December of the current reporting period, and provides details of the approach and schedule for testing the compliance of the central system with its specifications. It also ensures that the national systems and the central system exchange messages correctly through the interface defined in the ICD.
- Detailed specifications (DTS). This document contains the specifications which describe the technical and functional details of the central system. The Member States' parts of the DTS were finalised during the reporting period and version 1.0 was accepted in mid-December.

2.1.2. Site Preparations

Various technical difficulties related to the physical conditions at the planned Central Unit (CU) site in Strasbourg during the development became fully apparent during 2006, namely, the capacity of the existing air conditioning system and the sufficiency of the power supply to the site. Work was completed to improve the air conditioning system and reinforce the false floor in September to allow installation of SIS II, followed by the VIS. Works for upgrading the electrical power supply will start following the results of a study, and it is expected that the installation of the VIS CU will take place in late-2007.

Works on the site in St Johan, Austria for hosting the Backup Central Unit (BCU) were completed in November and covered the computer room adaptation for SIS II. The expectation is that the VIS BCU could be installed around the same time as the CU in Strasbourg in 2007.

2.1.3. Network

The scope of the VIS project includes the provision of a wide area communications network between the National Interface in each Member State and the Central VIS, meeting the requirements of availability, security, geographical coverage and level of service, to allow the national and central systems to communicate. It was aimed to have the contract for network services concluded by the end of 2005.

During the reporting period Commission services identified and elaborated the network requirements. The s-Testa network was identified as the optimum choice and a call for tender for s-Testa network services was issued by DG ENTR in accordance with the global schedule, with the aim of having the contract for services concluded at the beginning of the current reporting period. However, this timing for the contract for services was not possible due to difficulties in the award procedure, which required a new call for tender, with a delay of one year. The contract was awarded in mid-2006 and signed in September. Detailed planning with the network was ongoing through the end of the reporting period and the specific contract for the VIS is foreseen for mid-2007, with the network becoming available for testing by third quarter. The s-Testa delay introduced a minimum nine-month delay into the VIS project.

2.1.4. National Planning and coordination

Each month a Working Group meeting for the Member States' National Project Managers (NPM) is organised by the Commission's VIS Team within the framework of the SIS II Committee. The purpose of the NPM meetings is to deal with detailed planning issues, risks and activities both on the central and national project levels.

The Commission continued with the reporting mechanism developed during the previous reporting period to provide regular detailed updates on the status of the national projects, with a view to having a clearer picture of their state of development. The Member States continued to provide updates on progress in their national projects on a monthly basis within the SIS II Committee framework. Each Member State reports progress on a set of key milestones for the national projects and these are derived from the global project schedule. Some of the national project milestones depend solely on national factors and others are related to progress in the central project. The development of this reporting mechanism has enhanced the quality, consistency and usefulness of the information available.

The state of progress of the national projects varies between the Member States, with some being more advanced in their projects than others. This is to be expected given the variations in circumstances between the Member States.

At the end of the current reporting period, once it became clear that due to the ongoing discussions of the legal basis the project would not be on time, a new reporting template was developed and made available to Member States comprising new target dates for the key milestones. Up until September 2006, Member States reported against the deadline of December 2006 for achieving key milestones (1. NI location ready⁴, 2. VISION upgrade completed⁵, 3. National Interface ready⁶, 4. Simulator tests completed⁷, 5. Network readiness tests completed⁸, 6. Target date for Operational Systems Test (OST)⁹, 7. Target date for Provisional Systems Acceptance Test (PST)¹⁰, 8. Ready to connect to CS-VIS and go live, 9. National Interface prepared to receive biometrics) identified in the monthly reporting structure. They reported according to the Council conclusions of 2 December 2005 against the

⁴ Physical location has been fully prepared as is ready to host the access point to the new network / National Interface

⁵ Preparations have been made to enable Member States to start tests for the new network and SMTP

⁶ All internal tests have been completed and Member States are now ready to begin testing with CS-VIS

⁷ Tests against the CD simulator have been successfully completed

⁸ Preparations have been finished to be able to connect to the new network

⁹ Operational tests between National interface and CS-VIS

¹⁰ The last testing activity before going live, provisionally accepting the central system

deadline of March 2007 for equipping consular posts in North Africa as the first region (key milestone #10). After September, new dates¹¹ for the same key milestones were identified and Member States began to report against these more realistic dates at the end of 2006. By the end of the reporting period, nearly two-thirds of the information was not provided, but most Member States reported that they could be ready by the new target dates for most of the milestones.

During 2006 good progress was made in the national projects when looked at overall. Most Member States reported that they were able to be ready on time, while only five Member States would face significant difficulties.

2.1.5. Roll-out to Consular posts

According to the Council conclusions of 2 December 2005, biometrics should be collected from the start. In continuing preparation for this roll-out, a second pilot project for the capture, storage and verification of biometric data from visa applicants (BIODEV II), led by the French and Belgian administration, but incorporating several other Member States, commenced during the end of the reporting period. Both BIODEV (the first pilot project) and BIODEV II intend to demonstrate how to facilitate the implementation of the VIS at Member States' consulates and border crossings through the setup of common enrolment facilities or other consular cooperation initiatives. The findings of BIODEV were released to Member States at the end of the current reporting period and additional findings of BIODEVII are scheduled to be presented in mid-2007.

2.1.6. VISION migration

VISION is the Schengen consultation mechanism, run by the Council, for the prior consultation of central authorities of Member States on applications for Schengen visas, according to Article 17 (2) of the Schengen Convention. Current Schengen Member States exchange forms over the SISnet network for this purpose. The draft VIS Regulation foresees that this technical functionality will in the future be replaced by the VIS.

As according to the legal proposal, only the VIS application number can be exchanged for the purpose of these consultations, the replacement of the Vision mechanism by the VIS can only take place once all Schengen States have connected all visa issuing Consulates to the VIS via their national systems. This scenario has been presented in November 2006 by the Commission Services to the Council Vision Working Party.

2.1.7. Legal framework

On 28 December 2004 the Commission adopted a proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the Visa Information System (VIS) and the exchange of data between Member States on short-stay visas¹². Once adopted by the European Parliament and the Council, the Regulation will define the functionalities of the central system, and establish procedures and conditions for the exchange of data between Member States on short-stay visa applications. The data to be processed in the VIS shall

¹¹ 1. May 2007, 2. March 2008, 3. August 2007, 4. October 2007, 5. June 2007, 6. November 2007, 7. February 2008, 8. April 2008, 9. April 2008, 10. April 2008

¹² COM(2004) 835 final

include not only alphanumeric data and photographs but also, in order to ensure exact verification and identification, applicants' fingerprint data.

Negotiations on the proposal continued within and between the Council and the European Parliament during the reporting period, including holding various technical tripartite meetings and a political trilogue meeting on 4 December.

Two Commission Decisions related to the VIS were adopted in comitology during the reporting period: the 'biometric standards' Decision¹³ and the VIS site Decision.¹⁴ Member States voted in favour of these Decisions at the SIS II Committee meetings of July and August, respectively.

Also the negotiations on the proposal for a Council Decision concerning access for consultation of the VIS by the authorities of Member States responsible for internal security and by Europol for the purposes of the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences and of other serious criminal offences,¹⁵ presented by the Commission in November 2005, continued. Early in the reporting period the European Data Protection Supervisor issued his opinion on this proposal.¹⁶

2.2. Commission project management

2.2.1. Planning and budget

According to the Council conclusions of 17 February 2005,¹⁷ the processing of alphanumeric data, photographs, and biometrics was combined into one step. A negotiated procedure for this aspect was carried out during the year and €3,2 million was added for this purpose to the VIS budget.

The project is currently within the original budget forecast, as per the figures below. Budget commitment appropriations for the VIS have been secured for the next reporting period in the amount of €32 million, of which payment appropriations are €20 million.

Commitment and Payment budget 2006

Available commitment appropriations	Consumed	Total %	Available payment appropriations	Consumed	Total %
€24.050.000,00	€18.740.432,71	77,92%	€6.920.000,00	€685.906,43	9,91%

¹³ Commission Decision of 22 September 2006 laying down the technical specifications on the standards for biometric features related to the development of the Visa Information System (VIS) 2006/648/EC

¹⁴ Commission Decision of 3 November 2006 establishing the sites for the Visa Information System during the development phase 2006/752/EC
COM(2005) 600 final of 24 November 2005

¹⁵ Opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor on the Proposal for a Council Decision concerning access for consultation of the Visa Information System (VIS) by the authorities of Member States responsible for internal security and by Europol for the purposes of the prevention, detection and investigation of terrorist offences and of other serious criminal offences (COM(2005) 600 final) – (2006/C 97/03, OJ C 97 of 25 April 2006, p. 6

¹⁷ Council conclusions on the inclusion of biometric data in visas and residence permits of 17 February 2005, ST 6492/05, VISA 44, COMIX 127

2.2.2. Risk management

Risks refer to issues which are not completely in the control of the project stakeholders and which have the potential to impact on the schedule or outcome of the project. In accordance with best practice the project risks are identified, assessed and monitored on an ongoing basis within three risk logs.

Risk management is firstly performed by the main development contractor who assesses the risks that the part of the VIS project with which they have been entrusted (development of central system, provision of support and training services) will not be delivered on time or within budget or that it will not be of the required quality. These risks are constantly being reviewed both by the Commission's project team and by the main development contractor.

The Member States also monitor, in a similar way and on an ongoing basis, risks at their national project level. The Member States' identify both risks which they "own", that is issues which arise within the confines of their national projects, and risks which they do not entirely "own", that is, issues within their national projects which may depend on progress at the central level.

Finally, Commission services assess the overall risks to the project (global project risks), comprising for example the tasks of the main development contractor, the national projects, procurement of network services, preparation of the operational sites and adoption of the legal instruments.

These reports comprised the risks identified by Member States and updates as to whether they were on schedule to meet the key project milestones. The three risk logs were updated consistently throughout the reporting period and are available by request.

At the end of the current reporting period, a Project Support Office (PSO), led by the Customer Assistance contractor, was set up under the instruction of the Commission to assist the VIS project team with following up risks, actions and coordination of communication between various stakeholders. The PSO will begin to operate early in 2007.

2.2.3. Communication

Commission services report regularly on the status of the VIS project to the Member States within the framework of the regular SIS II Committee meetings and VIS Working Group meetings led by the Commission.

Progress of Member States was regularly reported in the meetings of the VIS Working Group with National Project Managers and circulated to the members of the Project Management Board and the SIS II Committee. 'Wiki' websites¹⁸ have also been set up for National VIS project team members in order to exchange information and ask questions about the development of all national projects.

Finally, Member States were invited to request bilateral meetings on technical issues, if necessary, with the Commission's technical VIS team in order to discuss in more detail

¹⁸ 'Wiki' is a [website](#) that allows visitors to add, remove, [edit](#) and change content, and this communications tool has been implemented for VIS national project developers in order to be able to easily share information

progress concerning their specific national project as well as progress made on the central side, or any issues of particular concern to that Member State. Several Member States took advantage of this option during the course of the year, which contributed to improved communication between the experts of the Commission and of the Member States in the context of the VIS project.

2.2.4. Project management board (PMB)

The VIS Project Management Board was established in 2004 and since the previous reporting period includes the current Council Presidency, all predecessors since its establishment and its two successors in order to ensure continuity of Member States' involvement in the project. During the reporting period, the Project Management Board met nine times, discussing project management issues with project stakeholders, the main development contractor and the quality assurance contractor.

2.3. SIS II Committee meetings

There were ten meetings of the SIS II Committee during the period under report, in which two Commission Decisions relating to the VIS were adopted, one concerning technical specifications for biometric features in the VIS¹⁹ and the other establishing the sites for the VIS during the development phase,²⁰ as mentioned in point 2.1.7.

In addition to regular SIS II Committee meetings, VIS working groups composed of Member States' experts are organised by Commission services to discuss detailed technical issues. These meetings generally focused on issues of concern to the Member States and issues arising from specific project deliverables. The Commission, Member States and the main development contractor gave presentations on various aspects of the project of concern to Member States. Workshop sessions were also organised in order to have closer contact with, and greater input from, the Member States. In addition, informal meetings with National Project Managers served to exchange information between Commission services and the Member States on, respectively, central and national planning and risk management.

During the reporting period, there were five one-day combined National Project Manager and Working Group meetings, four one-day National Project Managers' meetings and six one-day Working Group meetings. In addition, a seminar on the VIS was held in July to present a project overview to future Schengen Member States of Switzerland, Romania and Bulgaria, including the participation of new project managers from other interested Member States already involved in the project.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

2006 was characterised by steady progress towards the successful completion of the design phase, which was achieved at the end of the reporting period. Communication with Member States remained excellent, and relationships were strengthened within the working group

¹⁹ Commission Decision 2006/648/EC of 22 September 2006 laying down the technical specifications on the standards for biometric features related to the development of the Visa Information System

²⁰ Commission Decision 2006/752/EC of 3 November 2006 establishing the sites for the Visa Information System during the development phase

meetings. During the next period the central project should continue progress with the system development and deployment phases.

The delay that has materialised notably due to the absence of an adopted VIS Regulation will require a rescheduling of the entire project, which will include the development and incorporation of the BMS into the VIS.

Annex 1: Timetable from January to June 2007

Date	Description
24 January	SIS II Committee Meeting
23 February	SIS II Committee Meeting
22 March	SIS II Committee Meeting
27 April	SIS II Committee Meeting
31 May	SIS II Committee Meeting
28 June	SIS II Committee Meeting

Date	Description
23 January	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting
22 February	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting
21 March	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting
16 April	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting
30 May	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting
29 June	VIS Working Group/ National Project Managers Meeting

Annex 2: Acronyms

BCU	Backup Central Unit
BMS	Biometric Matching System
CS-VIS	VIS Central System
CU	Central Unit
DTS	Detailed Technical Specifications
ICD	Interface Control Document
NI	National Interface
NPM	National Project Managers
OST	Operational Systems Test
PMB	Project Management Board

PSO	Project Support Office
PST	Provisional Systems Acceptance Test
SISII	Second-generation Schengen Information System
VIS	Visa Information System