



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

Brussels, 10.5.2006
SEC(2006) 610

COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISA INFORMATION SYSTEM (VIS)

2005 Progress Report

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(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)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is a progress report on the work carried out by the Commission in 2005 on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS). It also sets out the timetable for future activities.

It is the second 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). Finally, during phase 3 (Migration and Integration) Member States will connect their national systems to the VIS central database. The project was in phase 1 during the current reporting period.

2.1.1. *Development of Central System*

The target is to have the central system developed and tested by the end of October 2006. From that point onwards the central system becomes available for testing with the national systems.

The main development contractor was expected to produce the following set of deliverables which define the system to be developed during 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 on 18 October 2005 that the ICD revision 1.5 was sufficient to continue work on their national implementations for the next six months. ICD revision 1.6 is planned for the beginning of 2006
- Detailed specifications (DTS). This document contains the technical specifications which describe the technical and functional details of the central system. The Member States' parts of the DTS were being finalised during the reporting period and were to be put to Member States for their agreement in the beginning of 2006.

¹ For the first report see the Commission staff working paper of 4 March 2005 on the development of the Visa Information System (VIS), SEC (2005) 339.

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)

- Both the ICD and Member States' parts of the DTS are fundamental design documents for the development of the national and central systems and, as such, presented no little challenge in their development. During the period under report the ICD and Member States' parts of the DTS were worked on intensively by Commission services, the main development contractor and the quality assurance contractor. Within the SIS II Committee framework, the Member States were also closely involved in reviewing the deliverables, including a two day review workshop in May 2005.
- Security deliverables. The three security deliverables (Protection Profile, Security Plan and Risk Analysis) were developed very carefully in the period under report and a comprehensive set of security measures has been produced. The documents had been finalised and were in the contractual acceptance process at the end of the period under report. It was intended to propose them for agreement in the comitology framework early in 2006.

2.1.2. Site Preparations

There remained two significant outstanding technical difficulties related to the physical conditions at the planned CU site during the development (Strasbourg) (namely, the capacity of the existing air conditioning system and the sufficiency of the power supply to the site). The extent of these deficiencies only became apparent at a late point in the process. Modifications to cater for the VIS (and SIS II) installations would require significant work to be carried out on site. Commission services and the French authorities are working closely together to resolve the outstanding issues and it is expected to reach a satisfactory outcome early in 2006.

2.1.3. Network

The scope of the VIS project includes the provision of a wide area communications network, 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 the period under report.

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 in accordance with the global schedule, with the aim of having the contract for services concluded at the beginning of 2006. However, this timing for the contract for services will not now be possible due to difficulties in the award procedure.

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.

During the reporting period Commission services developed, in consultation with the Member States, a new reporting mechanism 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 now 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. During the reporting period good progress has been made in the national projects when looked at overall. However, Commission services' assessment at the end of the reporting period, based on information provided by the Member States was that: eleven Member States should be ready on time, though for seven of them with very little time to spare; four Member States are in time for the majority of the key milestones, but cannot be on time for one of them; four Member States can meet half of the key milestones; two Member States cannot meet the majority of the key milestones and four Member States cannot meet any of the key milestones (see annex 1).

2.1.5. System Acceptance

System acceptance refers to a phase in which the central system and the Member States' systems test whether the exchange of messages functions as required. These tests do not use real data and are not performed in an operational environment. The test plan elaborates in detail the approach and schedule for testing the compliance of the central system with its specifications and also for ensuring that national systems and the central system exchange messages correctly through the interface defined in the ICD. Although not finalised by the end of the reporting period, agreement on the Test Plan was expected to be reached early in 2006.

2.1.6. Migration and Integration and roll-out to Consular posts

VISION migration (from using SISNET to using the s-Testa network) is planned to start for the Member States, which currently use the VISION network. Once this migration is completed, the recent Member States will then integrate with the new network, subject to the legal preconditions. There is a risk however that, if some of the Member States which currently use the VISION network were not able to switch to the new network in time, the recent Member States would not be able to use VISION.

According to the Council conclusions of 2 December 2005, the implementation of all functionalities (including biometrics) should start in North Africa in early 2007. In preparation for this roll-out, a pilot project for the capture, storage and verification of biometric data from visa applicants (BIODEV), led by the French and Belgian governments, commenced in March 2005. The project intended 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. First findings were released at the end of April and pertained to two consular posts (Bamako and Colombo) and a small number of Schengen entry points.

The migration and integration plans were in the acceptance procedure at the end of the reporting period. It was intended, however, that they would be accepted early in 2006.

2.1.7. *Legal proposals*

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 visas⁴. Once adopted by the Council and the European Parliament (co-decision) the Regulation will give the Commission the mandate to set up and operate the VIS, 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 include not only alphanumeric data and photographs but also, in order to ensure exact verification and identification, applicants' fingerprint data.

Discussions on the above-mentioned proposal are continuing within the two institutions^{5, 6}. In November 2005 the Commission presented a 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 offences⁷.

2.2. **Results expected during the next reporting period (January to December 2006)**

In accordance with the global project schedule during the coming year, the development of the central system should have made significant progress and be nearing completion. In addition, the site preparations should be finished and the technical infrastructure should be installed. The contract for network services should be finalised early in 2006 and the required network connections should be at an advanced stage. Member States should have made important progress on their respective national projects and be in the final stages of developing their national systems.

2.3. **Commission project management**

2.3.1. *Scope management*

Technical specifications and the design of VIS are based on the Council conclusions of 19 February 2004⁸ and the Council Decision No. 2004/512/EC of 8 June 2004 establishing the Visa Information System (VIS).

2.3.2. *Planning and budget*

Council conclusions of 17 February 2005⁹ brought forward the functionalities for processing biometric data in the VIS from the end of 2007 to the end of 2006. Therefore, the processing of alphanumeric data, photographs, and biometrics has been combined into one step with the aim of implementation into the VIS by 31 December 2006. This means that project planning has had to include biometrics, which has made the schedule for implementation by end 2006

⁴ COM(2004) 835 final

⁵ OJ C 181 of 23.7.2005, p.13

⁶ WP 110 published on

http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/fsj/privacy/workinggroup/wpdocs/2005_en.htm

⁷ COM(2005) 600 final of 24 November 2005

⁸ Council Conclusions on the development of the VISA Information System (VIS) of 19 February 2004, 6535/04, VISA 33, COMIX 111

⁹ Council conclusions on the inclusion of biometric data in visas and residence permits of 17 February 2005, ST 6492/05, VISA 44, COMIX 127

extremely tight. A call for tender for a Biometric Matching System was launched in spring 2005. Signature of the framework contract, as well as the specific contract for the VIS-BMS is foreseen for autumn 2006.

The project is currently within the original budget forecast. Budget appropriations for the VIS have been secured from 2005 until the end of the project.

2.3.3. Synergy with SIS II

Synergy between the VIS and the SIS II has been achieved by having both projects combined in the same call for tender and sharing the same technical infrastructure.

The Council Conclusions of 19 February 2004 on the development of the VIS stipulate that the technical and financial impact of a connection between the SIS II and the VIS should be further assessed and implemented, if justified by synergy benefits. In the period under report a study on SIS II-VIS connectivity was finalised and this investigated various technical scenarios for such connectivity. The study concluded that central connectivity provided a high level of synergy at the financial and technical levels. The Council's Article 36 Committee decided in October 2005 that connectivity between the two systems should be established centrally after the systems become operational. Commission services reopened the examination of various technical options that could allow the reciprocal access of SIS II and VIS data, while keeping the storage and access of data separate.

2.3.4. 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 and NI, 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 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.

During the reporting period the following major risks for the project were identified: insufficient staffing from the side of the European Commission, a possible delay in the adoption of the draft regulation, the introduction of biometrics at an earlier stage, late delivery of the network infrastructure, insufficient estimations for the bandwidth of the network,

Computer centres not ready for the central system and consular posts and borders not ready in time for biometrics.

2.3.5. 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.

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. These reports comprised the risks identified by Member States and updates as to whether they were on schedule to meet the key project milestones.

2.3.6. Project management board (PMB)

The VIS Project Management Board was set up on 15 September 2004, the Presidency of the Council is also invited to attend its meetings. During the reporting period, the Project Management Board met eleven times, discussing all project management issues with project stakeholders, the main development contractor and the quality assurance contractor. It was decided during the period under report to include, in addition to the current Council Presidency, its immediate predecessor and its two successors in order to assist in ensuring continuity in the Council's involvement.

2.4. SIS II Committee meetings

There were seven meetings of the SIS II Committee in the period under report.

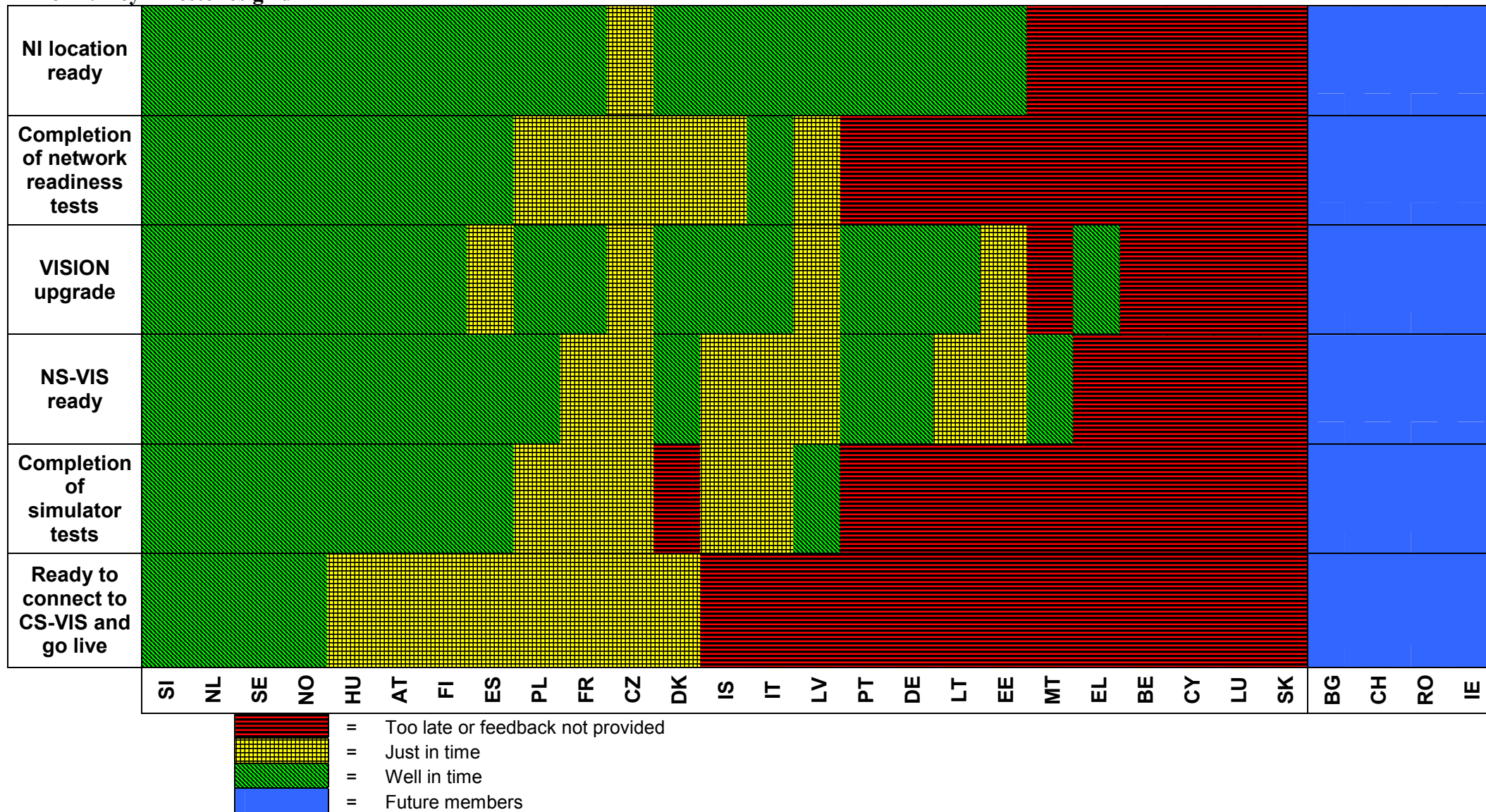
In addition to regular SIS II Committee meetings, VIS working groups composed of Member States' experts are organised by Commission services to discuss detailed technical issues. These meetings generally focused on issues of concern to the Member States and issues arising from specific project deliverables. Commission, Member States and the main development contractor gave presentations on the issues 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 the Commission Services and the Member States on, respectively, central and national planning and risk management.

There were 11 working group meetings held during the reporting period.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

2005 was characterised by progress towards completion of the phase 1 deliverables and improved information exchange on the status of national preparations, issues and risks. During the next period the central project should move into the system development and deployment phases. However, there are a number of identified risks which, should they materialise, might lead to a delay in delivering the system.

Annex 1: Key milestones grid



Annex 2: Timetable from January to June 2006

| Date | Description |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| 24 January | SIS II Committee Meeting |
| 24 February | SIS II Committee Meeting |
| 30 March | SIS II Committee Meeting |
| 27 April | SIS II Committee Meeting |
| 7 June | SIS II Committee Meeting |
| 29 June | SIS II Committee Meeting |

| Date | Description |
|------------------|---|
| 16 January | VIS Working Group |
| 14 & 15 February | VIS Working Group |
| 6 March | Seminar on integration in SIS II for Bulgaria and Romania |
| 28 & 29 March | VIS Working Group |
| 25 & 26 April | VIS Working Group |
| 19 May | VIS Working Group |
| 15 & 16 June | VIS Working Group |