



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 14 July 2017
(OR. en, fr)

11169/1/17
REV 1

VISA 269
COMIX 514

COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Mr Jordi AYET PUIGARNAU, Director
date of receipt:	13 July 2017
To:	Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

Subject:	Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates (Article 48(5), first paragraph, of the Visa Code) - Compilation of annual reports covering the period 2016-2017
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Delegations will find attached document the annual reports drawn up in the local Schengen cooperation, as transmitted by the services of the Commission.

Please note that the reports as regards Australia, Sri Lanka and Tunisia have been added in this revised version.

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*= third state whose nationals are subject to the visa requirement.



**EUROPEAN UNION – BASHKIMI EVROPIAN
DELEGATION TO ALBANIA
DELEGACIONI NE SHQIPERI
Political, Economic and Information Section**

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Albania 2016-2017 REPORT

1. Introduction

There are 18 EU Member States with diplomatic representation in Tirana/Albania. Moreover, Italy has two *General Consulates* in Vlora and in Shkodra and one *Honorary Consulate* in Gjirokastra. Greece has two *General Consulates*, in Gjirokastra and in Korca. Austria has a *Honorary Consulate* in Shkodra and Romania has a *Honorary Consulate* in Korca.

Since the entry into force of the Visa Code in September 2009 (Art. 48), the EU Delegation (EUD) is in charge of the coordination of meetings of the Local Schengen Cooperation which usually take place every six months. Visa Liberalisation for Albanian nationals is in force since December 2010.

Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Malta are represented by the Austrian Embassy for Schengen C type visas. Hungary represents Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia in C type visas. Denmark is representing Island, Norway and Sweden for Schengen C type visas and France is representing Portugal for Schengen C type visas.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

During the reporting period (April 2016 – March 2017), one LSC meetings took place on 15 December 2016. It mainly focused on the evolution of the migratory/refugee crisis – UNHCR was invited to part of the meeting – and on the discussion about the implementation of the Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework. The meeting was well attended by EU Member States, and chaired by the EU Delegation.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

On 25 September 2014 the Visa Information System (VIS) for Schengen short-stay visas became operational in all Schengen States' consulates present in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo¹, Montenegro and Serbia) and Turkey.

EU MS did not report any particular problems related to the application of VIS, in particular, or the Visa Code, in general.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

3.2 Exchange of information

The level of exchange of information within the LSC was good. Overall, MS shared information on problems related to the rise of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors to some EU Member States. Bilateral exchange of information also took place.

3.3 Any other initiative taken in LSC

At the LSC meeting held on 15 December 2016, EUD and MS agreed to share numbers and locations of MS nationals in Albania and seek assistance from EEEAS HQ (Consular Crisis Management Division) with regard to numbers of unrepresented MS. This was agreed within the context of the implementation in Albania of the Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework.¹³ MS (BE, EE, FI, FR, LT, MT, SI, HR AT, CZ, DE, NL and UK – who also shared figures for Australian and Canadian citizens –), have shared their figures.

4. Challenges

The period 2016-2017 continued to mark a considerably high number of unfounded asylum claims from Albanian nationals in EU Member States, notably in Germany and France. Albania should engage in more determined actions in the framework of the post-visa liberalisation monitoring mechanism (PVLMM) to address the high number of manifestly unfounded asylum applications of Albanian nationals abroad while respecting human rights principles

5. Other issues

A joint EUD, IOM, UNHCR mission was conducted in the south on 19 – 20 April to assess reception capacity, procedures affecting asylum seekers and the state of preparedness in case migratory flows would increase substantially. Two Border Crossing Points at the Greek border were visited (Kakavia and Qafe Bote). Meetings were held with the Regional Director of Border and Migration Police, Chief Commanders and staff at Kakavia and Qafe Bote, Mayor of Gjirokastër and Civil Society representatives working on migration and asylum (Caritas, Helsinki Committee and Ombudsman regional delegate). The mission also visited Gjirokastër's Centre for elderly people which is being rehabilitated to provide reception capacity for vulnerable migrants/asylum seekers and the terrain where the new Transit Centre (mobile containers) will soon be established. EUD shared the written summary of the reports with the EU Member States missions in Albania.



UNION EUROPEENNE
DELEGATION EN ALGERIE

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN ALGERIE RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

18 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique/ consulaire en Algérie: AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, MT.

Accords de représentation pour les questions de visa: AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU, PL représentent respectivement SI, LU, SK, LT, EE, LV, SE. NO représente DK et IS. En cas d'urgence et sur la base d'une demande expresse BE peut également délivrer des visas pour NL.

Recours aux prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visa: AT, EL, ES, HR, HU, NO, NL, MT (VFS Global); BE, FR, IT (TLS Contact); ES (BLS). FI utilisera prochainement les services de VFS.

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE en Algérie (Section Politique).

Les spécificités locales relatives à la délivrance des visas:

- l'Algérie figure parmi les Etats tiers les plus importants par rapport au nombre de demandeurs de visas Schengen. En 2016, 744213 demandes de visas uniformes (**6^{ème} place au niveau mondial**) ont été déposées auprès des missions diplomatiques des Etats membres à Alger, tandis que 507185 visas uniformes ont été délivrés (dont 78.16% par FR, 14.91% par ES et 3.22% par IT) aux ressortissants algériens. Le nombre élevé de demandes pour FR a des explications historiques et sociales (un nombre élevé de ressortissants algériens vivent ou ont des liens avec la France).

- dans le cas des certains consulats, **les délais de rendez-vous dépassent parfois même 2 mois** en raison du grand nombre de demandes. Cette situation semble être à l'origine d'un phénomène de "visa shopping" qui affecte occasionnellement les consulats où les délais de rendez-vous sont plus rapprochés (dans certains cas de quelques jours). Les échanges au sein de LSC suggèrent que les demandeurs pratiquant le "visa shopping" ont pour but de voyager principalement en FR, ES mais aussi dans d'autres Etats membres. Les consulats FR et ES sont également confrontés au "visa shopping" pour d'autres destinations.

- la plupart des Etats membres offre un nombre élevé de rendez-vous en régime d'urgence pour les demandes considérées prioritaires (missions, hommes d'affaires, urgences etc.).

- plusieurs Etats membres sont confrontés périodiquement à un taux élevé de "no-show".

- **de nombreuses tentatives de fraude** (notamment la falsification des justificatifs relatifs à la situation socio-professionnelle des demandeurs de visa) et de nombreux intermédiaires dans l'obtention des visas Schengen qui proposent des différents services: des invitations aux salons internationaux ou pour des visites médicales, et même des services ciblés pour les personnes avec un profil migratoire (sans travail ou avec des dossiers incomplets; des demandeurs dont l'octroi de visa a été refusé par plusieurs missions diplomatiques). Dans

¹ Avril 2016 - Mars 2017

certaines situations, ces services pourraient être en réalité des tentatives de facilitation de la fraude en matière de l'obtention de visas Schengen.

- certains Etats membres ont rapporté des retards de paiement par la CNAS (Caisse Nationale des Assurances Sociales des Travailleurs Salariés) pour la prise en charge des frais d'hôpitaux dans le cas des visas délivrés pour raison médicale.

- certains Etats membres ont signalé une **tendance à la hausse du nombre de mariages suspects** ("mariages blancs") avec des ressortissants UE.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2015-2016

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE en Algérie.

7 réunions ordinaires (en avril, juin, septembre, octobre, décembre 2016; janvier, mars 2017) ont été organisées dans la période de référence. A plusieurs reprises, la problématique Schengen ont fait également l'objet des discussions dans **les réunions des Chefs de mission** des Etats membres.

1 réunion extraordinaire de LSC a été organisée en avril 2016 à l'initiative du PT concernant la délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples, suite à la publication d'un communiqué de presse de la compagnie Air Algérie interprétant les dispositions du Code des Visas.

La réunion du mois d'octobre 2016 a été en grande partie focalisée sur **le fonctionnement des accords de réadmissions avec l'Algérie**, suite à la proposition de la BE et avec la participation d'autres partenaires non-Schengen (US, CA).

La participation des Etats membres représentés en Algérie aux réunions de coordination est généralement nombreuse et régulière. BG, HR, RO, UK sont invités systématiquement en tant qu'observateurs pour échanger des informations sur des questions relatives aux visas.

Les rapports des réunions LSC ont été établis systématiquement par la Délégation de l'UE et partagés avec les Etats membres. Les Etats membres communiquent les rapports à leurs capitales.

La coordination LSC est assurée également en dehors de la capitale Alger. Les rapports et les conclusions des réunions LSC sont communiquées par la Délégation aux consulats des Etats membres concernés (FR, ES) à Oran et à Annaba.

Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont activement collaboré dans le cadre de la coopération consulaire au titre de Schengen en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas. Dans la période de référence, l'activité de coopération a été axée principalement sur l'échange d'informations concernant:

- la délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples;
- les cas de fraude et l'utilisation de faux documents pour l'obtention de visas;
- les statistiques des visas, le fonctionnement du système VIS, les délais de rendez-vous et de décision relative à la demande ;
- les intermédiaires commerciaux agréés;
- les intermédiaires informels dans l'obtention des visas et les cas de détournement de l'objet de visa touristique;
- l'analyse du risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité, les routes d'immigration illégale et la structure socio-économique de l'Algérie;
- le phénomène de « visa shopping »;
- la réadmission des migrants illégaux algériens, la coopération avec les ambassades d'Algérie pour la délivrance des laissez-passer et l'identification des personnes ;
- les entreprises d'assurances qui fournissent des assurances médicales de voyage conformes;

- la relation avec les prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visas ;
- les exemptions de droits de visa ;
- la concertation dans la communication avec les autorités et les demandeurs algériens dans les questions de visa ;
- les réservations fictives de vol et d'hôtel ;
- l'utilisation du cachet dans les cas des demandes de visa national.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Le 23 septembre 2016, sur la base des travaux d'harmonisation de LSC, la COM a adopté la **Décision d'exécution C(2016)5927** modifiant la liste des justificatifs devant être présentes par les demandeurs de visa en Algérie. Les discussions au sein de LSC ont révélé que les Etats membres n'ont pas rencontré jusqu'à présent des problèmes particuliers dans la mise en œuvre de la Décision. L'ensemble des membres LSC ont confirmé l'application de la Décision.

Dans la perspective d'une révision future de la liste, FR (soutenue par ES) a réitéré sa proposition de supprimer toute référence à la réservation d'hôtel (dans le cas des demandes pour les visas touristiques). Pour FR, cette disposition est une source de fraude, la quasi-totalité des réservations produites étant annulées dans les minutes qui suivent la délivrance du visa, car les ressortissants algériens vont généralement chez leurs proches/ familles. Cette situation est à l'origine de nombreuses non-admissions à la frontière ainsi que de pertes subies par les hôteliers français à cause d'annulation des réservations. FR propose d'ajouter comme preuve alternative de l'objet du voyage touristique la possession par le demandeur de moyens suffisants de paiement pour l'hébergement. **En revanche, d'autres Etats membres insistent sur le maintien de la réservation d'hôtel** sur la liste des justificatifs, en particulier pour les visas touristiques, car ils considèrent qu'il s'agit d'un élément important pour évaluer la fin touristique du voyage ainsi que les tentatives de visa shopping.

3.3 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres LSC se déroule à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et/ou via e-mail. Les membres LSC échangent régulièrement et/ou ad-hoc, en fonction des besoins, des informations statistiques sur les visas délivrés/ refusés, les entreprises d'assurances qui fournissent des assurances médicales de voyage conformes, les cas (ou les suspicions) de fraude et d'utilisation de faux documents, les sources d'information au niveau local (concernant la sécurité sociale, l'assurance maladie), la situation des accords avec l'Algérie pour la suppression du visa pour les titulaires de passeports diplomatiques ou de service, le fonctionnement du système VIS.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

En mars 2017, HU s'est portée volontaire (pour un exercice de 6 mois) pour centraliser les statistiques échangées localement entre les consulats sur les visas uniformes, les visas à validité territoriale limitée et les visas de transit aéroportuaire délivrés ainsi que le nombre de visas refusés.

4. Défis

Réponses aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2015-2016

La concertation au sein de LSC, mais aussi au niveau des Chefs de mission des Etats membres, a permis une communication cohérente par rapport aux autorités et à l'opinion publique algérienne. **Deux situations particulières** méritent d'être mentionnées dans ce contexte:

- les précisions publiées (le 24 avril 2016) par la Délégation de l'UE sur son site web (et reprises par les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres), sur la base des consultations au sein de LSC et avec les services de la COM/DG HOME, concernant **la délivrance et l'utilisation des visas à entrées multiples**. Ces précisions ont été nécessaires suite à la publication d'un communiqué de presse de la compagnie Air Algérie (le 18 avril 2016) interprétant les dispositions du Code des Visas, qui a suscité un débat public.
- La note verbale de réponse adressée (le 15 février 2017) par la Délégation de l'UE au MAE algérien concernant les visas d'entrée pour les ressortissants algériens. La NV fournissait **une réponse commune aux demandes individuelles adressées par le MAE** à l'ensemble des Etats membres. La NV a été élaborée sur la base des consultations au sein de LSC et avec les services de la COM/DG HOME, **réitérant la politique commune des Etats membres en matière de visa**.

Le travail d'harmonisation de LSC a permis l'adoption (le 23 septembre 2016) de la Décision d'exécution de la Commission C(2016)5927 modifiant la liste des justificatifs devant être présentes par les demandeurs de visa en Algérie.

Les autres défis identifiés dans le rapport 2015-2016 ont fait l'objet d'un suivi régulier par LSC, mais **restent d'actualité (visa shopping, lutte contre la fraude documentaire, délais de rendez-vous)**. La fraude documentaire a été abordée dans plusieurs réunions et a fait l'objet des échanges email entre les membres de LSC. Plusieurs Etats membres sont demandeurs de formations sur le sujet.

Une base commune de contacts utiles (autorités algériennes, sociétés de transport international, banques, sécurité sociale etc.) est en cours d'élaboration. La Délégation centralise les données fournies par les membres de LSC.

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2017-2018)

- Continuer à **communiquer de manière concertée** par rapport aux autorités, aux demandeurs et à l'opinion publique au sujet de la réglementation Schengen;
- Veiller au respect des dispositions du Code des Visas par rapport aux **délais de rendez-vous**, signaler le cas échéant les besoins éventuels des consulats en terme de capacités ;
- Assurer une application harmonisée des dispositions législatives en vue d'éviter le "**visa shopping**";
- Renforcer avec l'appui des Etats membres la **lutte contre la fraude documentaire/visa**, renforcer la formation et les capacités pour l'analyse des documents au niveau des consulats;
- Finaliser la **base commune des contacts utiles** de LSC (autorités algériennes, sociétés de transport international, banques, sécurité sociale etc.).
- Mettre à profit le **poste mixte Multi DG (HOME-JUST)** créé en 2016 pour renforcer les capacités de la Délégation de l'UE dans les domaines de coopération locale au titre de Schengen, migration et consulaire.

Le rapport a été approuvé par tous les États membres présents en Algérie.



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

DELEGAÇÃO NA REPÚBLICA DE ANGOLA

April 2016 / March 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ANGOLA 2016-2017 REPORT

1. Introduction

In Angola, there are thirteen Schengen Member States represented locally: Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Norway. All have their consular services centralised in the capital Luanda, except for Portugal which has a second Consulate in the town of Benguela.

The Embassy of Sweden in Luanda handles its own consular services (provisional passports and other assistance in the consular field), but it is the Embassy of Norway in Luanda that issues Schengen visas for Sweden. On 31st July 2016, Sweden ceased to have an honorary Consul in Luanda. Hungary's consular services are not yet fully functional but will be soon.

In terms of local representation of non-resident Schengen: Norway also represents Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Switzerland; Belgium represents Luxembourg; Poland represents Slovenia and Latvia; Germany represents Estonia; Italy represents Malta; and Portugal represents Austria, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Greece.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Three regular meetings were held during the reporting period. These meetings were well attended and much information was exchanged.

As agreed in 2011, the LSC meetings convene roughly each trimester and are chaired by the EUDEL, which is also responsible for distributing the agenda and the minutes of each meeting to all the participants. MS share the LSC common report with their capitals. Germany is responsible for collecting visa statistics.

There has not been any coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital but all MS are in permanent contact and whenever the need arises the LSC network works fairly well. Only one MS is represented outside Luanda: PT has a Consulate in Benguela (South of Angola).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The tasks foreseen for Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code are being ensured by MS and EU Delegation.

MS have reported difficulties in exchanging specific information on visa refusals via the formal application (VIS) and have requested more guidance and orientation on this particular

aspect. Document fraud and the reliability of certain documents were also referred to as obstacles to the proper implementation of the Visa Code.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In order to better reflect the practices adopted by EU MS in Angola and to reinforce controls against document and identity fraud, the LSC group agreed in February 2017 that the common list of supporting documents should be updated. The main changes concern the need for applicants to hand in a copy of their identity document, in order to allow proper assessment of file and the preoccupation with the trafficking of minors. Regarding the latter, the LSC group considered that the birth certificate of the child (Assento de Nascimento), or valid Identity Card (with the mention of parents' names) and application form signed by both parents or legal guardian should be submitted. In case one of the parents is not present at the moment of the submission of the application, signature of only one parent will be accepted if so duly authorised by the other parent by means of a notarized written document. A court decision authorizing one single parent or guardian to travel with the minor will be accepted for the purpose of a visa application signed and presented by a single parent or guardian.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Due to their very different levels of consular activity, MS report different numbers of long-validity MEVs issued. In the case of most, given that Angolans do not often travel to MS, the number of long-validity MEVs is not significant. This type of Visa is often issued to Angolans on business or to specific categories such as politicians. PT, being the MS that issues the largest number of visas, also issues the highest number of long-validity MEVs to Angolans, basing its decisions on a combination of present circumstances and the compliance rate of each applicant. This type of assessment is not easily adopted by other MS as most applicants are first time applicants. The percentage of Angolans who overstay their visa duration is not significantly high.

3.4 Exchange of information

Describe the exchange of information within the LSC:

- statistics;
- cases of fraud;
- refused visa applications;
- specific situations of minors and asylum seekers;
- use of VISMail;
- useful contacts within the Angolan administration;
- requests for political asylum.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report.

4. Challenges

Angola is going through an important period of political transition but also through a period of financial and economic crisis. As the economic crisis deepens in Angola, it is foreseeable that the number of visa applications will continue to decrease (at least for tourism), except for Portugal, as the purpose of travel is often other than tourism (family private visits, business,

medical reasons, etc.). It is also likely that fraudulent attempts will continue to occur. These two challenges are regularly discussed in the LSC meetings and useful information is exchanged.

An EU-ACP Southern Africa project concerning the trafficking of Human Beings is being developed. LSC should be called to discuss this issue further and collaboration with Angolan authorities in this context should be improved.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO ARMENIA

Political, Economic, Press and Information Section

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ARMENIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

11 MS have resident embassies in Armenia; 7- France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Czech Republic and Poland- issue Schengen visas. All visa-issuing consular sections are located in the capital, Yerevan.

For visa purposes, apart from their own countries, France represents Portugal, Norway, Iceland; Germany represents Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxemburg, Sweden and Austria; Italy represents Finland and Malta; Lithuania represents Spain, Denmark, Hungary, Latvia, Estonia. Poland represents Slovenia, Slovakia, and Switzerland. Czech Republic issues Schengen visa for the Czech Republic only. The embassies of Lithuania, Greece and Italy cooperate with visa support centres: VFS Global (LT, GR) and TLS Contact (IT).

In the reporting period, Schengen meetings were coordinated by the EU Delegation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Several LSC meetings took place in the reporting period. The implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement and technical issues related thereto were the main agenda points of the meetings, which were well-attended by the Schengen consuls, and Romania and Bulgaria as observers. The EU Delegation chaired the meetings. The LSC meetings served as a good opportunity for the consuls to have brainstorming on the topical issues related to their daily activities.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS are well prepared to carry out the tasks under the Visa Code. However, in an effort to reduce the risk of visa misuse, which has become frequent recently, the Czech MFA required that visa applicants in Armenia submit a proof of payment for the accommodation.

Poland pointed to the fact that sometimes the travel insurance the applicants submit does not meet the conditions set by the Visa Code, which requires unlimited responsibility up to min. 30000 EUR. That is to say, the real coverage of the insurance plans in question, normally offered and chosen by the applicants due to its low price, offers the insurer's liability only up to 1000 USD per each insurance case.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

N/A

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

There has been no explicit need to harmonise visa-issuing practices in terms of MEV validity length. The most frequently issued MEVs have one- year validity.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information between the MS can be overall assessed as good. Local consuls regularly sent visa statistics and exchanged information on possible visa fraud, refusals and returned asylum seekers via email. While VIS is successfully operated in Armenia, VISMail lacks popularity amongst the MS institutions.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

The challenges mentioned in the previous reporting periods still persisted.

- fake and forged documents and provision of false information
/employment certificates, bank statements and hotel reservations and wrong information on family situation/
- Armenian citizens can legally hold two passports: biometric and "ordinary"
- High rate of asylum seekers
- Outstanding hospital bills
/applicants who had presented proof of their financial sustainability further failed to pay hospital bills/
- Absence of a unified list of contact points in ARM institutions

5. Other issues

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO AUSTRALIA

29 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) AUSTRALIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

There are 21 Schengen countries represented in Canberra who regularly participate in the LSC Group (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). In addition the Observer Countries also attend on a semi-regular basis (Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania) with Cyprus taking part in all meetings)

We have continued to run back-to-back meetings with the Consular group, a formula which has been working well since its inception in October 2013 (and since 2014 non EU-Schengen Members also attend the Consular meeting following consent of the group).

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

To date, the LSC Group has met once in 2017, and twice within the last six months of 2016. Two meetings took place in Canberra and the last meeting for 2016 held in Sydney. The attendance for these meetings both in Canberra and Sydney is always very good with all meetings chaired by the Head of the Political Section in the Delegation. The minutes of the meetings were prepared by the Delegation and shared with the group and submitted to HQ. We can confirm that MS share the minutes with their capitals.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

As reported last year, the application of the Visa Code does not seem to pose any major problems in Australia. We regularly include this topic on all Agendas with the main point of discussion this past year being the interpretation of the TMI, in particular the repatriation of remains and the amount of insurance cover Australian companies apply. The EUDEL has met with the Insurance Council of Australia who has undertaken to approach their members to alert them to this specific clause and were confident that they would solve the issue by mid-2017.

3.2 Harmonised lists of supporting documents

Following recommendations from HQ regarding additional changes and liaison with LSC, the EUDEL submitted our revised text to HQ in March 2016 which was submitted to the Visa

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

Committee for approval in March 2017. In late March we were advised by HQ to clarify a specific word within the text and after consultations with LSC the final document was sent to HQ. The EUDEL will wait for approval from HQ before placing the consolidated information on the EUDEL and LSC websites.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EUDEL created an extensive spread sheet enabling us to accurately collect and record visa statistics on a quarterly basis from each of the LSC MS. This data is sent to HQ each quarter and shared with MS. It is also uploaded onto the password protected AGORA local Intranet to which member states have access, together with all other information shared.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The LSC Group has created a spreadsheet listing the point of contact Australia-wide for Schengen Visas and which will be kept up to date on a regular basis. The information will be made public and put up on the Delegation's website as well as the websites of all LSCs.

In addition, the LSC has created a second spreadsheet detailing where residents of PNG can obtain Schengen Visas.

4. Challenges

A majority of the MS represented in Canberra are also accredited to many of the countries in the Pacific. The introduction of biometrics for the Schengen visa has meant that people from the Pacific have had to travel to Australia (for which they will also need a visa), to apply for a Schengen Visa. The EUDEL advised the Group on the state of play of these agreements and we hope to see these issues resolved soon.

During 2016, the EUDEL was advised of the closure of the French consular section in Papua New Guinea (PNG) resulting in PNG residents having to apply for Schengen visas outside PNG (often here in AUS). EUDEL MS in cooperation with EUDEL PNG has collected information to show where PNG residence can apply for visas.

In addition, we have recently been advised that France is re-considering its (consular) presence in Fiji. LSC will be kept seized of this to ensure information flow as to where Fiji residents will be able to apply for visa in the future.

*MS experience the very real problem of “**visa shopping**” sometimes based upon the time it took to obtain a visa, time delay in obtaining appointments, the distance required to travel etc.. MS also discussed existing differences of interpretation of the Visa Code when determining the Consulate responsible for issuing the visa [relating to length of stay or main purpose of visit]. MS saw no quick fix, however, agreed that a common approach by all MS was desirable and that MS should contact each other prior to controversial decisions to avoid negative impacts.*

5. Other issues

No other issues at present

***This report will be shared with the Local Schengen Corporation Group.*



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO Azerbaijan
Head of Delegation

24 May 2017 / Baku

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN AZERBAIJAN 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

During the established period the EU Delegation was chairing the LSC in Azerbaijan. To that end, it was in charge of coordination of related issues, organising meetings and providing support were necessary in close communication with national authorities.

There are 21 diplomatic missions of EU Member States accredited to Azerbaijan. Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Slovak Republic and Slovenia have their diplomatic representations accredited outside of Azerbaijan. From non-EU Schengen Countries Norway and Switzerland have diplomatic missions in Baku.

12 LSC Member States are physically present and providing consular services in Azerbaijan: Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Switzerland. In the reporting period the number of Schengen MS consular posts remained the same. There are no LSC consular sections outside Baku.

The following Schengen countries are represented by other Member States as follows: Belgium (represented by France), Denmark (represented by Norway), Estonia (represented by Latvia), Finland (represented by Norway), Iceland (represented by Norway), Luxembourg (represented by France), Malta (represented by Italy), Netherlands (represented by France), Portugal (represented by France), Slovak Republic (represented by Latvia), Slovenia (represented by Latvia), Spain (represented by France), Sweden (represented by Norway).

The number of the LSC members which are using external service providers is regularly increasing (France, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Latvia, Czech Republic, Hungary), while using the services of VFS Global, TLS Contract, VisaMetric, BRS International. Germany intends to start outsourcing from 2018. France will rely on the full outsourcing starting from October 2017.

The reporting period presents the full year when the implementation of both EU-Azerbaijan Agreements on Visa facilitation and Readmission (signed in June 2014) had to be insured from both parties (it started on September 1, 2014).

The Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements between Norway and Azerbaijan were signed on December 3, 2014. Norway accomplished all internal procedures. No bilateral meetings were organised separately.

¹ April 2016-March 2017

On 10 October 2016 Switzerland and Azerbaijan signed a bilateral Visa Facilitation Agreement, that entered into force on 1 April 2017.

The absolute majority of all applicants are Azerbaijani citizens, but smaller percentage of applicants, mainly from Turkey, Russia, Georgia and Iran (in most cases with temporary or permanent residence permits applied). In addition, diplomats of accredited embassies got Schengen visas. During this year AZ's citizens took advantage of the visa facilitation regime, including officials, business people and their family members. LSC sees the trend in submitting the fraud documents together with application for visa as remaining acute issue; in addition this takes a lot of effort to check their validity.

As a result of fraud cases and huge number of multi-entry visa holders, the refusal rate by Schengen consular increased from 4.51 % up to 9 % and the total number of issued C visas decreased from 61,386 in 2015 to 52,263 in 2016.

2. LSC meetings held in reporting period April 2016-March 2017

During the reported period LSC meetings were organised on a regular monthly basis. They are, as a rule, all held in the premises of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Azerbaijan (EUDEL).

In the reporting period, the LSC meetings were held regularly almost every month with some exception (during summer holidays, other conflicting events). As a result there were in total **10 regular meetings**: seven in 2016 (20 April, 25 May, 18 July, 31 August, 28 September, 26 October, 30 November) and three in 2017 (25 January, 22 February, 29 March). The meetings were all called upon and chaired by the representative of EUDEL. The LSC meetings are usually well attended, gathering between eight to twelve MS on average. Bulgaria, Romania and the U.K. participated as observers on the meetings upon the common agreement of the LSC participants.

In addition to LSC regular meetings a joint demarche together with representatives of MS at the Consular Department, MFA related to the implementation of VFA, was carried out on 13 January 2017 and a follow up LSC meeting together with the representatives of local authorities from the Consular Department, MFA was hold on 25 January 2017 in EUDEL premises.

Meetings were mostly focused on the trends of visa related statistics, as well as practical issues related to implementation of VFA / bilateral arrangements (visa fees, outsourcing practises, lengths to issue visa, reciprocity, understanding the host nation relevant legislation and changes, etc), as well as on falsified documents and the prevention of asylum cases.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is applicable since May 2010 and is being implemented by the Consular Offices of the Schengen states located in Azerbaijan.

Matters of mutual interest (refusal rate and reasons for refusal, harmonisation of visa processing time, fees and exemptions from fees) were covered in the context of the

endorsement and mutual implementation of EU-Azerbaijan Visa Facilitation (VFA) and Readmission Agreements (RA). Consuls compared practices from Member States and host country sides.

- the total number of visa applications submitted to LSC embassies in 2016 was equal 59118 and decreased by around 8000 applications in comparison to 2015 (equal to 67165). The main reason for the decrease of the application numbers was the economic crisis resulting in difficulties to get foreign currencies but also in unemployment and uncertainty in the population. Fraud cases did not cause smaller number of applications; the work load in handling these cases has rather increased. The other factor of possible decline might be the increase in the issuance of multiple entry visas as less and less people have the need to frequent applying for Schengen visas. The embassies of France, Germany and Italy received the biggest number of visa applications that makes around 58% of all applications received in Azerbaijan.

- the total number of C visas issued in 2016 is equal to 52263 and decreased by 9100 visas in comparison to visas issued in 2015. The same embassies (of France, Germany and Italy) have issued around 60% of C visas from the total number of visas issued by the LSC embassies in Azerbaijan.

- the ratio for C type multi-entry visas (MEVs) in 2016 was 34 % and remained almost the same as in 2015 (33%). The embassies of Germany, France and Italy issued around 71% of all MEV from the total number of visas issued by the LSC embassies in Azerbaijan.

- the average refusal rate for 2016 (8.7%) in comparison to 2015 (4,51 %) increased almost by almost 2 times.

-the number of MEV in general terms decreased from 20776 visas in 2015 to 17617 visas in 2016.

- processing time for all visas is very short. The time for interviews depends on the number of applications to be processed and could be extended in case of a high number of applicants presented during certain seasons of the year. As a general rule, the time length is less than 10 days (between 1 and 6 working days). However, it can be extended in cases where additional documents should be presented.

After the conclusion of VFA, the issuing of multiple-entry visas (MEVs) with a long validity accompanied by certain procedural facilitations was considered to be the only win-win solution for both sides.

While LSC members have issued a big number of MEV with a long validity, it appeared that issuance of MEV visas with long term validity (of 2 years or more) continued to be the major obstacle for Azerbaijani side. During demarche meeting (January, 2017) Azerbaijan authorities informed that currently Azerbaijani embassies are not in position to issue long term visas due to technical problems, but they confirmed that the necessary IT related works are foreseen and will be implemented within few months. EUDEL raised the same question in view of EUDEL staff members and a possibility to receive long term validity (as long as the length of the contract, 3-4 years) visa issued by the MFA. Azerbaijan MFA confirmed that this should not be a problem and that visas duration should not depend on the validity established in their diplomatic resident card (which usually is of 2 years duration). In this case, it was also noted that it would be essential to explicitly mention the requested duration

of MEV visa with long term duration in the respective NV, that is presented to MFA when submitting the application.

This issue was thoroughly discussed with Azerbaijani respective authorities during the demarche meeting and a follow up meeting in 2017. The need to improve the implementation as established in VFA from Azerbaijani side was also mentioned during the official EU-AZ meetings.

From the beginning of 2017 Azerbaijan introduced an electronic visa application system (via ASAN), which facilitated the visa issuance for visitors who are coming to Azerbaijan on tourism purposes. Visa can be issued in 3 days while applying via this system.

The LSC considers it as a big improvement in view of LSC citizens who wishes to travel to Azerbaijan for tourism. However, LSC considered that the conditions of issuing visas for the categories of people established in VFA (officials, staff members of delegation, business people, etc.) should have at least the same speedy treatment when applying for visa via respective Azerbaijani embassies, which is not the case. As explained by Azerbaijan MFA, Consular authorities the applications received visa electronic way (namely through ASAN) can be treated much quicker than those are received and treated manually by the embassies. During the demarche (January 2017) Azerbaijan Consular authorities informed that Azerbaijan embassies should soon be upgraded with respective IT systems, that would allow to have smoother procedures.

Workload: the number of visa applications handled per full time visa section staff member ranges from one to a few hundreds (for visa sections that have not outsourced the visa handling to external service providers).

The Visa Code is implemented with maximum capacity by local consulates. All posts/consuls are well informed and trained to run local consular offices and apply common visa policies, assess migration/security risks etc. The communication and coherent cooperation between locally accredited consulates is well established and the standardisation of practices is a permanent work in progress.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

All LSC members require supporting documents according to the list, established by Commission Implementing Decision C(2015) 1585 final of 16.03.2015. In addition, a necessity to introduce a requirement that all the applicants should present a copy of the first page of their passport is being discussed.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EUDEL regularly shared information via established Local Schengen distribution email list.

LSC successfully utilise the system of information exchange between MS already for few years. The process has been handled relatively smoothly and the information system of LSC's is running efficiently. Consuls shared information and analysis of visa and asylum statistics, focused on relations with host country MFA consular department and distributed hotlines and emergency numbers with authorities, new system of Azerbaijani e-visas, the treatment of

official notes from government bodies etc. MS exchanged data on suspicious applicants, on new consular initiatives or changes in Azerbaijan's visa policy, analysed best practices in particular Schengen countries, discussed surveys on migration and asylum topics, updated the contact list for LSC consuls etc.

LSC paid a particular attention to the exchange of information about asylum cases and practices to avoid issuing visas to asylum seekers, which is a major concern for many countries.

- Monthly and Annual Statistics

Statistics, in line with requested format, are provided regularly to the EUDEL on a monthly basis (see attached Annex A –annual visa statistics). EUDEL then compiles these statistics into an annual overview. The absolute majority of MS provide the reports and information regularly. The process takes time and data are not always readily available. In addition, exchange of information took place a.o. on issues such as multi-entry visa statistics (how to showcase number of different multi-entry visas).

Part of locally based LSC members are collecting and exchanging statistical data on uniform visas, visas with limited territorial validity, airport transit visas issued, visas with long term validity as well as time length needed to issue a visa, as well as the number of visas refused; however not all LSC are in position to fully contribute to this process on regular basis. The monthly statistics then was compiled to the annual statistics table.

- Cases of fraud

Mutual efforts were made a.o. to ensure the exchange of information on bad practices: "visa shopping", false proof of employment, and false proof of ticket bookings or reservations for accommodation. MS paid special attention and deeply analysed some single cases with particular "problematic" groups of individuals (sportsmen and individuals travelling for medical treatment or tourism purposes). MS generally act in real-time to inform others of persons holding several passports, visa annulments and/or migration alerts. Few cases of fraud were identified and were related e.g. to covering the Schengen MS refusal stamps.

- Requests on issuance of visa's in Baku airport

LSC exchanged practises of requesting for visa's for LSC citizens in airport. This opportunity is being used on rather exceptional basis and only by some member states (only in case where there is no embassy of AZ or in short-notice cases).

During the meeting with Azerbaijan MFA, LSC was informed that with entering into force of electronic visa application system - the facilitated visa procedures that was implemented in Baku airport in view of the citizens of Qatar, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Japan, China, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore as of 1 February 2016 will be cancelled.

In the beginning of 2017 Azerbaijan President tasked the respective border institutions to introduce the facilitated visa issuance procedure while entering the country via its' lands borders. Seemingly it has not yet been implemented.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

- Meetings with MFA's Consular department

In the reporting period there were two meetings with host country authorities on consular affairs and implementation of Visa facilitation.

The JVC meeting is envisaged in Baku on 5 of July, 2017.

The regular formal exchange of information between the Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local consular shall be further improved. LSC expects that visa facilitation implementation should be insured and carried out rather in systematic and institutionalised way, rather than every time based on ad hoc solutions and personal contacts.

- Observers

LSC cooperation extends to other like-minded nations (Romania, Bulgaria, UK) with regular meetings to learn from each other. It has also been helpful for Consuls in their daily work to obtain information on visas issued or refused from those embassies. Information on visa related issues is also exchanged on informal basis with US embassy.

- Training

Some bilaterally arranged trainings have been held between MS, while visiting their visa sections.

- Information exchange tools

Agora: EUDEL informed LSC about an available tool that allows sharing information locally.

4. Challenges

- Ensuring the reciprocal implementation of EU-AZ VFA in terms of issuance visas with MEV long term validity and during shorter duration, in urgent cases.
- Need to have a directly established "hotline" with a Consular section, MFA at 24/7 basis since there is no established shift system; need to identify contact details or this Consular Point of Contact in MFA.
- Lack of information related to updates on decrees, amendments in the field of visa matters provided from AZ MFA to LSC. It would have been appreciated if the AZ side could have sent such information as soon, as it is available.
- MS continued to exchange information in matters of relevance to the LSC consuls to ensure standardisation of practices. The practises of issuing visas with long term validity for the groups established in EU-AZ VFA shall be further exchanged.
- Upgrading the mechanism and regular exchanges to address suspected cases of visa fraud or migration alerts.
- Enhancing cooperation between MS consular offices through exchange of personal/on the job training.
- Addressing the need for the trainings sessions to be held in Baku with participation of competent EU Commission DG, specialized agencies (Frontex) and regional MS experts meetings/seminars on LSC issues

LSC Azerbaijan has set a number of goals for the next period. Those can be listed as follows (list non exhaustive):

- Receiving information updates on legal acts related to consular issues.
- Holding dedicated discussions with MS on harmonisation of different practises and looking for a ways hot to improve it further (the issuance of multiple entry visas, visa

practice in general (how to assess various applications), groups exempted of visa fee when the VFA is open for interpretation and other interpretation related matters).

- Organise training sessions in Baku with participation of competent Commission DG and MS experts on relevant to LSC issues.

5. Other issues

Need to have regular exchanges of information on asylum, border migration initiatives.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO BANGLADESH

Dhaka, 16 March 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The following Schengen Member States are present in Dhaka, Bangladesh:

Schengen Member State	Also represents	Represented by
Denmark	Norway	
France	Austria, Portugal	
Germany	Estonia, Hungary	
Italy	Greece, Malta, Slovakia	
Netherlands		Sweden
Norway		Denmark
Spain		
Sweden	Belgium, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Iceland	
Switzerland	Liechtenstein	

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

EU Delegation, Head of Administration, chairs the LSC meetings. Meetings are scheduled on a monthly basis (2016) or bi-monthly basis (2017). Ad hoc meetings can be called if an urgent need arises. Meetings are generally well attended. Occasionally a Member State may be absent due to heavy workload or staffing constraints.

The EURLO, (European Return Liaison Officer), funded by the EU and hosted by NL, arrived in Dhaka early 2017. He is an integral part of the LSC Bangladesh and as such invited to all LSC meetings. No ad hoc meetings took place.

Regular meetings took place according to the following calendar:

Month	Day
April 2016	11 th
May 2016	10 th
June 2016	-
July 2016	- ²
August 2016	-
September 2016	6 th
October 2016	5 th
November 2016	14 th
December 2016	-

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Scheduled on July 4th, the meeting was cancelled following the terrorist attack in Dhaka on July 1st

January 2017	23 th
February 2017	-
March 2017	12 th

Some MS have observed an increase in visa applications. As a consequence of the terrorist attack on July 1st, 2016, some international businesses have reduced their presence in Bangladesh. More Bangladeshi businessmen now travel to the international businesses, (including in Schengen area).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States are interested in maintaining the dynamics and momentum of the regular LSC meetings. However, feeling a reduced need for frequent meetings, the LSC has decided in January 2017 to reduce the frequency of the meetings from monthly (2016) to bi-monthly (2017).

The main issues encountered are not per se with the implementation of the Visa Code but rather with issues related to the specific environment, (many fake papers submitted by applicants, over-use of official passports or Note Verbale, difficulties to check bank statement validity, ...).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Several submissions to the Visa Committee of the harmonized *List of supporting documents to be submitted by visa applicants from Bangladesh*; have resulted in only a few remaining pending questions.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Exchange of views to harmonize some practices takes place during the LSC meetings. Further activities are expected in this field once the Harmonized list will have been formally approved.

Validity of long-term are not fully harmonized. Nevertheless, most MS take a similar approach, i.e. thorough checks, one-year duration, only exceptionally longer duration and then only for clearly genuine cases with a clean history.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States exchange the following information:

- Statistics of applications received, visa issued and refusal rate, (on a monthly basis by email),
- Cases of fraud or practical cases or difficulties encountered, (during the LSC meeting),
- Regarding the implementation of the VIS, (since November 2015), none of the Member States raised any issue.

Exchange of information takes place during the LSC Schengen meetings or via email. VIS Mail is not used for this purpose.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

According to the Visa Code Article 48.3.a, most LSC MS share their monthly statistics, using a uniform template. The LSC Chair collates all inputs into one file giving details per Member and totals LSC Bangladesh. That result is then circulated to all LSC MS.

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2015-2016 report:
 - a. Implementation of Harmonized list, has not yet become a challenge since the Visa Committee has not yet accepted the proposal from LSC Bangladesh;
 - b. Possibility for more harmonized information on MS websites, has not been tackled since it was scheduled as a follow-up on the Harmonized list;
 - c. Setting up one common accessible file for monthly statistics has been solved by creating a centralized file for the LSC MS statistics, based on MS input, maintained by LSC Chair (EU);
 - d. Increased regular participation of all MS; some improvement has been noted; there is a commitment for improvement.
2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2017-2018):
 - a. Implementation of the Harmonized list
 - b. Continuation of the collated statistics

5. Other issues

This annual report was drafted by EU and LSC MS. The final version has been approved by LSC Bangladesh.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BELARUS

15/05/2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Belarus 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Ten Schengen Member States (MS) deliver visas (Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) out of fourteen (Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland) present in Minsk. Bulgaria and Romania are also present and deliver visas.

As representation is concerned, please note the following:

- Estonia represents Finland and Sweden;
- France represents Iceland and Norway;
- Germany represents Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia;
- Hungary represents Switzerland and Liechtenstein;
- Italy represents Malta;
- Latvia represents Spain, as well as - in Vitebsk consular district – Austria, Estonia, France, Netherlands, Slovenia and Poland;
- Lithuania represents Greece only for official delegations and diplomatic passports, as well as Czech Republic in Grodno (for Grodno and Brest regions), and Estonia;
- Slovakia represents Portugal.

Nine MS opened visa application centres (Denmark, Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Estonia).

The MS work towards the full implementation of the Council Conclusions on Belarus of 2011, 2012 and 2016.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

During the reporting period there were five regular LSC meetings (on 20 April, 6 July, 20 October 2016, 7 February and 14 March 2017).

The meetings are generally well attended; 9-10 MS were usually present in the meetings. Embassies of Bulgaria and Romania are always invited to the meetings and sometimes attend. As previously, EU Delegation (EUDEL) is organising and chairing LSC meetings in its premises. EUDEL draws up the meetings' reports and disseminates the draft among LSC members for comments before their final adoption. Some MS send these reports to their capitals; others draw their own reports. EUDEL asks MS for input to the meetings' agenda before each meeting.

MS Consulates General outside Minsk are informed about the LSC meetings and related issues via e-mail (they receive meetings' agenda, reports, questions by one MS to another, etc.).

3. State of play

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

EUDEL and MS are committed to implement the tasks as per the Visa Code.

Since 2016, MS share the burden of collecting visa statistics; statistical overviews provided by the MS are very informative and of high quality.

MS noted that there is a difference of opinions regarding the obligation (or lack thereof) that the travel medical insurance covers the additional 15 days grace period on top of the dates of travel. MS also discussed issues relating to revocation of visas and issuing visas with overlapping validity to holders of more than one passport (e.g. ordinary and diplomatic passport).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

A Commission Decision establishing the List of supporting documents for Belarus has been approved on 29 April 2014 and is now legally binding for all the MS. The EU Delegation monitors the implementation of the List by the MS and the provision of unified information to the applicants.

In 2017 the MS discussed an amendment of the List to possibly include shopping as a purpose of travel. This proposal will continue to be discussed in the next reporting period with some alternatives being considered.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In the reporting period, the MS achieved harmonization of practices under the flexibilities offered by the Visa Code as follows:

Art. 16-5 b) All MS waive the visa fee for holders of diplomatic and service passports.

Art. 16-5 c) All MS agreed to waive the visa fee for participants aged 25 or less in seminars, conferences, sports, cultural or educational events, organized by non-profit organizations.

Art. 16-6 cultural events – MS waive the visa fee.

All MS waive the visa fee for applicants whose travel to Schengen has a connection to programmes of developing civil society in Belarus.

All MS waive the visa fee in the interest of foreign or development policy.

Harmonization could not be reached in the following fields:

Art. 16-6 sports events – due to differences in a definition of what constitutes a sport event (e.g. sport as a hobby?).

Visa Code Art. 16-5 a) waving a visa fee for children – not possible to harmonize due to the practice of one MS.

Provide information on the length of validity of multiple entry visas (MEVs) issued. This need not be detailed statistics for each MS, but on the basis of a tour de table where MS indicate the average length of validity of MEVs issued and, possibly broken down on 1-year MEVs, 2-year MEVs, 3-year MEVs, 4-year MEVs and 5-year MEVs (in %). Do not name specific MS.

The number of MEV issued by MS is growing and exceeds the number of single entry visas. The most common validity of MEV issued is 1-2 years. The number of MEV with 4-5 years validity is very small (around 1% of MEV issued).

MS are generally willing to issue multiple entry visas with longer validity for family members, visiting Belarusian citizens residing in a Schengen MS, students and businessmen.

Some MS limit the validity of the visa to the length of the residence permit of an inviting person.

3.4 Exchange of information

In the reporting period, MS shared the responsibility for collecting visa statistics. Trends in statistics are regularly discussed in the meetings.

In addition to discussions in the LSC meetings, MS use e-mailing to raise questions concerning cooperation with travel agencies, insurance companies, cases of fraud or any other issue related to the issuing of visas.

The functioning of the VISMail was a subject of discussion, with most MS reporting technical problems which make it impossible to use.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

MS support each-other by offering services of their experts (in-house or visiting) in documents security, migration risks etc.

MS in Minsk were also encouraged to keep in closer touch with their representatives in the Visa Committee.

4. Challenges

Should the Visa Facilitation Agreement be signed in the next reporting period, the LSC will be required to adjust the current List of supporting documents accordingly.

5. Other issues

Responding to a request from the Belarusian MFA, several Member States provided samples of filled-in Schengen visa stickers, for the purpose of hands-on training of Belarusian Border Guards. Two Member States provided training for Belarusian Border Guards. The Ministry of Interior of Belarus offers to Member States Consulates cooperation in identifying visa applicants who pose a migration risk.

Member States in Minsk facilitated issuing visas for EU funded large scale people-to-people contacts project MOST.

EU Delegation kept Member States informed about the progress in EU internal negotiations of the Visa Code recast, negotiations with Belarus of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, Mobility Partnership and projects resulting from cooperation in these fields.

The report was approved by the Member States on 15 May 2017.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN (LSC) A COTONOU (BENIN) - RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

Depuis le 1er juin 2015 au Bénin, seulement deux Etats Schengen ont des représentations diplomatiques habilitées à délivrer des visas à Cotonou: l'Allemagne et la France.

Depuis début 2014, l'Ambassade des Pays-Bas ne délivre plus de visas localement. Les demandes sont réceptionnées localement puis traitées par le Bureau régional des Pays-Bas au Ghana.

Concernant le nombre de demandes traitées par les EM: la France traite environ 12.000 demandes par an et l'Allemagne environ 400 demandes par an (année 2016), soit une forte diminution des demandes vers l'Allemagne.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2016-2017

Depuis janvier 2013, la Délégation de l'UE assure la Présidence et le Secrétariat du groupe LSC au Bénin qui se réunit deux fois par semestre.

Pendant la période d'avril 2016 à mars 2017, nous avons tenu 3 réunions Schengen (07/06/2016, 27/09/2016, 01/12/2015, 08/01/2017) avec une participation des Etats Schengen présents au Bénin (y compris la Suisse).

La Présidence et le Secrétariat du groupe est assuré par la DUE. Les rapports de réunions sont validés par les EM. Chaque EM rapporte directement à son siège.

La coordination LSC n'est pas assurée en dehors de Cotonou, car pour le moment, cela n'est pas nécessaire compte tenu des réalités du pays.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1. Application du Code des Visas

Les EM présents au Bénin appliquent le code des Visas en accord avec les instructions reçues par leurs autorités respectives. Les 2 EM délivrant des visas au cours de la période couverte par ce rapport utilisent le système VIS sans grandes difficultés à signaler. Cependant, et comme mentionné l'année dernière :

- Pour des contraintes liées au système sur le plan national, certains demandeurs de visa ayant déjà laissé leurs empreintes sont toujours soumis à la procédure

¹ Avril 2016 – Mars 2017

d'enregistrement des empreintes dans une période de moins de cinq ans, quand il y a eu un refus préalable.

D'autres questions dans l'application du code visa sont:

- Les consulats continuent de constater des cas de fraude documentaire (relevés bancaires, fausses déclarations d'importation, fausses lettres d'invitation...). Les réunions LSC servent aussi de cadre d'échanges d'informations, de pratiques communes et de discussions sur des dossiers frauduleux.
- Les Etats-membres soulignent la sophistication croissante des fraudes.
- Ce type de (faux) dossiers a conduit à une hausse des refus au cours du second semestre 2016, pour l'ensemble des postes émettant des visas Schengen à Cotonou (France, Allemagne, Pays-Bas), qui atteignent 40% certains mois. L'attitude étant maintenant de la même sévérité dans les trois postes, le "*visa shopping*" pour ce type de demandeurs est maintenant évité.

3.2. Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs

Le travail d'harmonisation de la liste de documents justificatifs est terminé et appliquée par les 2 EM. Les différents EM publient les documents sur leurs sites web.

3.3. Echange d'informations

Les statistiques sont partagées dans chaque réunion avec une compilation annuelle, si bien que la circulation des informations entre les représentants des EM est régulière.

Dans les réunions, les cas de fraudes sont mentionnés et parfois présentés pour vérification et/ou consultation entre les différents consulats.

Conformément à la demande des EM, l'entreprise SICASS qui effectue le contrôle documentaire à l'aéroport pour les 3 compagnies aériennes relayant l'espace Schengen (Air France, Brussels Airlines et Royal Air Maroc) participe une fois par semestre aux réunions pour échanger sur des cas de fraudes documentaires, la coordination et faciliter le contact.

Dans la même logique, le policier français en mission à l'aéroport est généralement présent au cours des coordinations et informe les EM sur les éventuelles difficultés constatées.

La coordination téléphonique et/ou par mail entre les EM est active au Bénin dans le traitement de certains dossiers.

Les participants ont été informés sur l'entrée en vigueur du **système ETIAS** d'enregistrement des données des voyageurs à destination de l'Europe. Pour le Bénin, cela concerne uniquement les ressortissants béninois dispensés de visas, à savoir les détenteurs de passeports diplomatiques ou de service se rendant dans certains Etats Schengen ayant conclu un accord bilatéral.

3.4. D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

N/A

4. Défis

Les défis suivant sont identifiés:

- Il convient de poursuivre la veille et la vigilance relative aux cas de fraude documentaire.
- Le Bénin a décidé en août 2016 de laisser entrer sur le territoire sans visa tout ressortissant d'un pays d'Afrique. L'impact sur les visas Schengen n'est pas avéré mais il pourrait y avoir davantage de demandes provenant de non-Bénois.
- En raison de la diminution à deux consulats délivrant des visas Schengen à partir du 1er juin 2015 (France et Allemagne), les possibilités d'échanges d'information et d'expériences seront plus limitées.
- Avec l'arrivée de passeports de service et diplomatiques biométriques et lisibles en machine, le nombre d'EM dispensant de visas les détenteurs pourrait augmenter. Or, les autorités béninoises reconnaissent elles-mêmes un faible contrôle du nombre de passeports e services en circulation et des règles d'attribution pour le moins floues (voir rapport LSC du 4 juin 2015).
- Certains EM regrettent l'absence d'informations sur des problèmes constatés à l'entrée de l'espace Schengen (voyageurs avec visa mais considérés inadmissibles sur l'espace Schengen). L'Ambassade d'Allemagne reçoit les données de la Police aux frontières mais ce n'est pas le cas de la France.

5. Divers

Rien de particulier à signaler

L'ensemble des Etats membres ont approuvé le présent rapport.
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UNION EUROPEENNE

Delegación de la Unión Europea
en Bolivia

15 Mai 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BOLIVIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Of the 7 Schengen Member States (MS) present in La Paz (Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Switzerland), only 5 issue Schengen visas locally. Other 19 Schengen MS are represented by another MS. The visa issuing MS are Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Denmark also issues in La Paz visas for citizens from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Sweden never had a visa section here, while Switzerland closed down theirs in 2013.

The countries represented by another Schengen MS are: Estonia (represented by Germany), Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Iceland, (represented by Denmark²), Malta, Slovakia and Slovenia (represented by Italy), Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland (represented by Spain). France's consular section, although represented by Spain, continues to process directly a limited number of visa applications. **The General Consulate of Spain located in Santa Cruz is the only LSC consular section situated outside the Capital city of La Paz.** For a number of reasons, data from the ES Santa Cruz Consulate were not included in past LSC reports and are being provided for the first time starting from the current exercise.

All MS present in Bolivia, except Germany, rely on external outsourcing service providers for the collection of applications: VFS Global or BLS International Services (the latter established La Paz since 1st January 2017).

The total number of visa applications received in La Paz in 2016 (14,005) was 41.4% higher than the number received in 2015 (9,903). The average refusal rate was 8.46 % against 6.04 % in 2015 (i.e. an increase of 40%) but lower than the level of 10,5% registered in 2014. One MS (ES) recorded the highest increase in the numbers of visa request processed (+ 50%). **The total number of visa applications received in Bolivia in 2016** (including the ES Santa Cruz Consulate) **was 19,401.** Detailed comparison at country level will only be possible from next year's report.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Local Schengen Coordination Meetings were held - when possible - back-to-back with the Consular meetings and took place at regular interval (quarterly) at the premises of the EU Delegation. The meetings are called by the EU Delegation.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Also represents Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Regular LSC meetings took place on 12 July, 4 October 2016 and 2 March 2017. LSC meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (Head of Political, Trade, Press & Information Section). Consular meetings were chaired by IT.

The meetings were well-attended with an attendance rate of 100% among the 5 embassies issuing Schengen visas in La Paz. The meetings focused on current topics such as attempted fraud and travel restrictions, the need to harmonise visa practices to prevent visa shopping and diverging treatments of visa applicants. The meetings also provided an opportunity to share information to further the coordination on a number of relevant and related topics, including security and fraud issues.

During the period under review, the EU Delegation was in charge of drafting of the agenda as well as the meeting minutes both for the Consular and the Schengen meetings. (For the Consular agenda, close coordination with the chair MS is maintained).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Statistics collected both centrally and locally in 2016 indicated substantial differences among MS in La Paz on:

- Refusal rates: ranging from 0,3 % to 11,9 %;
- Average waiting time to get a visa: ranging from 2 to 5 calendar days;
- Workload: the number of visa applications handled per full-time visa section staff member ranges from 225 to 3006 (including visa sections that have outsourced the visa handling/pre-screening to the external service provider VFS Global).

Despite these differences in refusal rates, there is no report or concern by LSC members about "visa shopping". All highlighted that the difference in refusal rates lies mainly in the different profiles of visa requests received: one MS noted their visa requests concern essentially "family visits": Another indicated their visa requests come from a much wider audience being the main EU entry point. All flagged good cooperation in signalling those few attempts at visa shopping in cases of visa refusal.

Given the small number of MS in La Paz, the LSC only established in 2016 the "ad-hoc" working group on Art 48.1a of the Visa code – Harmonised list of supporting documents. No working groups were created for:

- Art 48.1b – Criteria for exemptions from paying the visa fee
- Art 48.2 – Common Information Sheet
- Art 48.3a – Exchange of information on Monthly Statistics
- Art 48.3b – Exchange of information on Fraud and Migration Risks
- Art 48.3c – Exchange of information on Transport and Insurance Companies

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

During the reporting period, the LSC finalized the work in regard to the harmonisation of the lists of supporting documents. The draft list was approved at the meeting of 11 May 2017 and

has been sent to DG Home B2 [ref: Ares(2017)2436426 of 12/05/2017] for submission to the Visa Committee. DE chaired the working group by common agreement of all MS.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

N/A

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings have been an opportunity to exchange information on a number of topics relevant for the issuing of Schengen visas, such as the statistical survey, travel insurances, fraud attempts. In relation to this latter point, various criminal networks dedicated to visa fraud (visa forgery), have been discovered over the past year in the main Bolivian cities, the most important networks being located in the cities of Cochabamba and Sucre.

Statistical data on uniform visas, visas with limited territorial validity, airport transit visas issued as well as the number of visas refused is not collected locally on a regular basis. The EU Delegation together with the MS will ensure that exchange of statistics is made in conformity with Visa Code Art 48.3, when compiling the data for 2016-2017 (see point 3.1).

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

The finalisation of the list of harmonized supporting document.

An initial draft was submitted to HQ in October 2013. The Visa committee met in December 2013 and Comments were received in January 2014. Concrete progress in discussions was later hampered by staff rotation both in the Delegation and in key MS. Work resumed in January 2016 and is currently completed (see above point 3.2).

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

Note:

The present report has been approved by all MS concerned (both at the LSC meeting of 11/05/2017 and through later emails).



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

15 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

4. Introduction

Since July 2010, the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) coordinates and chairs the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings in BiH, as of 2014 with the support of EU Special Representative's Office (EUSR) in the context of the integrated EU presence in BiH. EUD/EUSR prepares agendas and minutes and provides all necessary support to EU Member States (EU MS) in accomplishing these activities. EU MS and Schengen Associated States (SAC) are invited to provide input for the agendas of upcoming meetings to ensure high currency and relevance of the discussions and information sharing among all participants.

There are 17 EU MS/SAC diplomatic missions present in BiH [Austria (AT), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), France (FR), Italy (IT), Hungary (HU), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Sweden (SE) and Norway (NO)]. The consular section of NL covers Luxembourg (LU) and Belgium (BE) in terms of visas, while the consular section of HU covers Lithuania (LT) and Estonia (EE), AT covers Malta (MT), SE covers Denmark (DK) and Slovenia covers Switzerland (CH) and Portugal (PT). Even though BG, HR and RO are not yet part of the Schengen area, they have diplomatic missions in BiH and are invited to the LSC meetings².

Compared to the previous reporting period, the number of visa applications slightly increased without need for outsourcing of the related services.

In the reporting period, BiH retained the visa-free regime it had been granted in 2010. It is worth mentioning that currently there is a unique company able to provide BiH with the needed biometric passports (Muehlbauer). Within the one-year contract period, a maximum number of 550.000 passports is to be produced. This number largely covers the annual average of biometric requests (360.000) and allows considering BiH passport supply as secured.

In the LSC meetings held so far the focus regarding the Local Consular Cooperation was development of the contingency plan and security of the Embassies' personnel in case of crisis. Efforts did not reveal concrete results so far. However the EUD/EUSR will persist on these activities.

Regarding the migration issues, there were no concrete indicators of possible turns of migration influx into BiH.

¹ April 2016 – May 2017

² Visa free regime for BiH citizens is valid also in RO and BG.

5. LSC meetings held in April 2016- May 2017

In the reporting period, EUD chaired three regular LSC meetings (7 April 2016, 8 December 2016 and 24 March 2017). The number of meetings was adequate with regard to the stable implementation of the Visa Code, with no significant problems reported. The meetings were well attended and participants actively discussed the issues. EUD drew up the reports of all the LSC meetings and shared them with MSs. In turn, MSs shared the reports with their capitals.

Beside other issues, the LSC meetings mainly discussed the three following subjects:

1. Implementation of the Visa Code;
2. Post-Visa Liberalisation Monitoring Mechanism (PVLMM);
3. Migration crisis effects in BiH, the region and the EU.

One ad hoc meeting was convened on 7 April 2016 to inform the participants on the general situation related to the migration crisis in Greece, FYROM and consequences the crisis caused in the region. The Sub-regional Director for the international Organisation for Migration, invited as speaker, explained concrete practical cases and the steps the IOM had taken in this context. The participants were also informed about the possible changes in migration routes as a potential effect of closing the Western Balkans Route (possible migration routes would turn the migrants to Albania towards Croatia and to Bulgaria, Romania and further to Hungary). It was explained that there was no high probability of migratory routes turning towards BiH.

6. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is in force since April 2010 and is being implemented by the Consular Offices of the Schengen states located in BiH.

During one of the three meetings, some MSs expressed their concern on the reluctance of other MS's consulates when inquiring access to visa application files of persons who are later found staying illegally in the Country in question. The MSs concerned had invoked data protection issues.

Some MSs expressed their willingness to introduce information on the main C visa applicants' nationalities as well as on the number of long-term visas (although they are subjected to national legislation). As from the first Quarter 2017 the local statistics have included data on the nationalities and long-term visas too.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Harmonisation of a list of supporting documents: There were no changes in the reporting period and no need for updates.

Common list of BiH travel medical insurance companies: There were no changes in the reporting period and no need for updates.

Harmonisation of visa fee: There were no changes in the reporting period and no need for updates.

3.3 Harmonisation of practises

In the reporting period, no initiatives have been taken to further harmonise visa-issuing practises such as issuing of MEVs. Information on the average length of validity of MEVs issued will be collected on the next LSC meeting and shared with DH HOME consequently.

3.4. Exchange of information - visa statistics

EUD/EUSR collects visa statistics from EU MS and SAC through their missions in BiH. In the reporting period there were no problems reported and all EU MS and SAC kept providing their statistics in a standard way.

Statistical indicators for April 2016 – March 2017 showed a slight increase for the visa applications, while the visa rejection rate decreased. A total of 1.498 applications in 2016 compared to 1.395 received in 2015 indicate a **7% increase**. The trend on issued visas increased slightly, about 4%, comparing 1400 visas issued in 2016 to 1.340 issued visas in 2015. The number of multiple-entry visas issued **decreased by 27%** in comparison between 2016 (836) and 2015 (1.145).

The visa refusal rate decreased **by 13%**, comparing 51 rejected visas in 2016 to the 59 in 2015. Consequently, the share of visa refusals in the total number of visa applications in 2015 decreased from 4% in 2015 to 3% in 2016.

Analysing the general trend in the last 6 years (2011-2016) after the introduction of visa-free regime, statistics revealed **9.025** visa applications and **8.458** visas issued with yearly average values of **1.504** and **1.409**, respectively.

Visa statistics in BiH in 2016 (per EU MS and Schengen Associated State)

2016	A visas applied for	A visas issued	Multiple A visas issued	A visas not issued	C visas applied for	C visas issued	Multiple-entry C visas issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued / refused
AT (incl. MT)	-	-	-	-	79	74	71	-	2
BG	-	-	-	-	123	123	70	-	0
CZ	-	-	-	-	46	33	27	-	4
DE	-	-	-	-	197	188	99	-	7
DK	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	0
EL	-	-	-	-	368	348	18	-	2
ES	-	-	-	-	14	14	7	-	0
FR	-	-	-	-	26	12	12	-	2
HR*	-	-	-	-	203	202	146	-	1
HU (incl. LT,EE)	-	-	-	-	88	84	77	-	0
IT	-	-	-	-	156	156	156	-	0
NL (incl. BE, LU)	-	-	-	-	46	33	28	-	13
NO	-	-	-	-	3	2	2	-	1
PL	-	-	-	-	11	11	10	-	0
RO	-	-	-	-	14	14	13	-	0
SE**	-	-	-	-	11	7	2	-	4
SI (incl. CH, PT)	-	-	-	-	94	80	80	-	14
SL	-	-	-	-	17	17	17	-	1
Total	-	-	-	-	1.498	1.400	836	-	51

* Including General Consulates of the Republic of Croatia in Mostar, Banja Luka and Tuzla.

** Visa statistics includes figures of the SI Consular Department in Sarajevo as well as figures of the Consular Department in Sarajevo as well as figures if the Consular Office in Banja Luka.

Visa statistics in BiH during 2016 (month per month)

Month 2016	A visas	C visas applied for	C visas issued	Multiple-entry C visas issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued/refused
January	-	53	49	28	-	1
February	-	103	87	57	-	2
March	-	123	124	92	-	7
April	-	156	154	104	-	1
May	-	131	123	86	-	7
June	-	264	249	90	-	2
July	-	145	149	77	-	1
August	-	134	126	74	-	7
September	-	103	82	52	-	14
October	-	86	83	54	-	2
November	-	74	66	43	-	4
December	-	126	108	79	-	3
Total	-	1.498	1.400	836	-	51

The tables listed above provide an overview of monthly and yearly statistics broken down into visa categories and respective embassies in BiH. They also offer insight into workload/individual statistics of all embassies separately. Average monthly values for each visa category can be calculated easily as well as seasonal peaks impacts for every single embassy. Most of visa applicants were citizens of Turkey, the Near East countries, China, Pakistan etc.

3.4 Exchange of information

Compared to the previous reporting period most of changes happened in the following PVLMM areas:

Document security area passed through a turbulent period in 2016/2017 period for difficulties in the BiH biometric passport issuing process. Upon expiring of the contract with current supplier company (Muehlbauer) and failing to select a new supplier in a timely manner for a long-term selection process defined within the Public Procurement Law, biometric passport issuing process became questionable. Upon many interventions from different sources the issue was solved in February 2017 and the biometric passports issuing process has continued, which is one of the main pillars of the Post-Visa Liberalization Monitoring Mechanism and visa-free regime for BiH.

Integrated Border Management (IBM) area was significantly improved in its segment of the Regional cooperation defined as one of the objectives in the IBM Strategy and Action Plan. The TAIEX Workshop organized for 'Improvement of Capacities of the Joint Police Cooperation Centre (JPCC)' in Trebinje 17-18 May 2017 resulted in many significant improvements in segment of police data exchange through a better understanding of limitations related to personal data protection in this context. This will surely improve many business processes in the JPCC useful for daily operations of police agencies in fighting all forms of the cross-border major and organized crime. The Workshop was organized after a series of preparatory activities with local interlocutors at the state and regional level. Besides,

BiH authorities developed the IBM Annual Action Plan 2017 that is with the Council of Ministers of BiH in adoption process.

In the area of *migration policy*, two remaining rulebooks defined in the Strategy and Action Plan are to be adopted. All other objectives set for 2016 on migration and asylum policies were successfully accomplished. Implementation of the new legal framework did not reveal any significant problems. There are no indicators of potential migration crisis in BiH.

Illegal asylum seekers from BiH further represent a challenge for both EU and BiH. Reports of FRONTEX suggest that number of BiH asylum decreases. However, compared to the statistics prior the visa liberalization this number is still significantly high, sometimes multiple times higher depending on seasonal peaks. Additional efforts and measures of BiH authorities and EU revealed some improvements, however a difference between the 'push' and 'pull' factors is significant. Current social and economic situation in BiH represents the main driver and motivation of BiH illegal asylum seekers to (re)apply in EU+ countries.

Visa policy in BiH and visa issuing processes are highly harmonized with the EU acquis. BiH authorities continued the implementation of the “zero” policy for issuing visas at border crossing points. There were no significant changes in BiH visa policy in the reporting period.

Trafficking in Human Beings policy did not reveal any major changes. Legal framework is further improved, however requires additional improvements towards full harmonization with the EU Acquis. In the reporting period the EUSR/EUD supported several activities for improving this policy through incorporation of training on standardization of evidences into the Judicial Curriculum and organization of TAIEX Workshop on the same subject. Two more TAIEX workshops remain to be implemented in the coming period, which will significantly improve qualification of this crime in the court processes, more quality verdicts and more efficient protection of (potential) victims.

Travel medical insurance: No changes or problems reported by the embassies in the reporting period.

Visa Information System (VIS) – roll out: No changes or problems reported by the embassies in the reporting period.

4. Challenges

- To follow changes, developments and practical implementation of the Visa Code,
- To follow PVLMM-related issues with a special emphasis on document security, IBM, migration and asylum,
- To discuss possibilities for supporting local authorities to improve PVLMM-related policies, especially IBM, migration/asylum and organized crime.

5. Other issues

FRONTEX training

With regard to the latest FRONTEX training on forged documents, in the meetings held in the reporting period relevant representatives of the embassies expressed their desire for such trainings again. These trainings should be organized in a form of 'refresher trainings' for visa/consular sections of the respective embassies. The next trainings should be more focused on forged travel documents of the high migratory risk countries (Turkey, Middle/Near East countries etc.) since encountering such documents in daily operations is rather rare and therefore relevant personnel lacks additional experience/expertise on such documents. For

that reason, the EUD/EUSR will verify with the HQ in Brussels possible options to organize such dedicated training(s) through FRONTEX to assist the embassies in the best possible way. In addition, possibilities to organize such trainings more times a year and to introduce it as a regular practice will be examined either.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

Head of Delegation

GABORONE, 9 JUNE 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BOTSWANA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Germany, France and the UK have embassies in Gaborone, Botswana. Until June 2016, Germany and France both had visa sections and had divided up the un-represented Schengen countries between them. With the closure of the visa section at the French embassy in June 2016, only visas for the Schengen countries represented by Germany in Botswana (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) can be obtained in Gaborone (after the closure of the French visa section, Germany also took on the representation of Switzerland and Luxemburg). Applications for most other Schengen countries are in Johannesburg/Pretoria.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

No formal LSC meetings were held in the time period. With the closure of the French consular section, there also will be no meetings. Informal meetings take place regularly. In 2016, there was one formal meeting of the consular officers of all EU MS. With only 3 MS present, there is no formal chair of such consular meetings. Two meetings of consular officers including honorary consuls took place in 2016 and were chaired by the EU Delegation. In the future, it might make sense to do a once-yearly LSC meeting in Johannesburg/Pretoria to coordinate the issuance of Schengen visas for applicants from Botswana by the German Embassy in Gaborone and the visa sections of the remaining member states in Johannesburg/Pretoria.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No LSC meetings took place in Gaborone.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Only one MS issuing visas, thus harmonisation achieved in practice.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Only one MS issuing visas, thus harmonisation achieved in practice.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3.4 Exchange of information

German embassy regularly shares statistics of visas issued per Schengen country with the EU Delegation.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

No 2015-2016 report was done for Botswana. For 2016-2017, several members of the COAFR working group have asked the EU Delegation and MS to look into solutions for issuing visas for applicants travelling to Schengen countries not represented in Botswana.

5. Other issues

The option of perhaps having a once-yearly LSC meeting outside of country in Johannesburg/Pretoria should be looked into. The German Embassy could then present their experience and a certain harmonisation of Schengen procedures could be attempted, also to avoid trans-border “visa shopping”.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BRAZIL

Brasilia 22 May 2017

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) Brasilia/BRAZIL
2016-2017 REPORT (March 2016 – April 2017)**

1. Introduction

The Delegation of the European Union to Brazil chairs the EU Schengen group meetings. The following Schengen MS Embassies (or Schengen associated MS) are present in Brasilia:

1. **Austria** (also issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Malta and Latvia)
2. **Belgium** (also representing Luxemburg in consular issues; Belgium reopened consular department at the Embassy in Brasilia, however Schengen issues are dealt with only by the General Consulate of BE in Sao Paulo)
3. **Bulgaria** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
4. **Cyprus** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
5. **Croatia** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
6. **Czech Republic**
7. **Denmark** (all visas for Denmark are issued by Norway)
8. **Estonia** was present until 31 December 2016 (Estonian representation in Brasilia did not issue visas and the Spanish Consulate General in Sao Paulo issues Schengen visas for Estonia)
9. **Finland** (short-stay visas for Finland are issued by Norway)
10. **France**
11. **Germany** (due to limitations of the consular department at the Embassy in Brasilia, all visa issues are dealt with by the General Consulates of DE in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre and Recife).
12. **Greece**
13. **Hungary** (only issues long-stay visas)
14. **Italy**
15. **Netherlands**
16. **Poland** (holds Schengen representation for Latvia at the Consulate General in Curitiba)
17. **Portugal** (also issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Slovenia)
18. **Romania** (not applying the common visa policy in full, but invited to LSC meetings)
19. **Slovakia**
20. **Slovenia** (Schengen visas for Slovenia are issued by Portugal)
21. **Spain** (issuing Schengen visas for Estonia in Sao Paulo)
22. **Sweden** (short-stay visas for Sweden are issued by Norway)
23. **Norway** (also representing Sweden and Finland for short-stay visas and Denmark for all the visa-related issues)
24. **Switzerland** (also issues Schengen visas for Hungary in Swiss Consulate in São Paulo)
25. One Member State present only outside the capital: Lithuania
The General Consulate of Lithuania in Sao Paulo constitutes a very special case as this Member State does not have an Embassy in the capital Brasilia.
26. **Luxembourg** will be opening an Embassy in Brasilia in 2017

Due to the continental size of Brazil and the very limited resources of EU DEL, it is impossible to coordinate Local Schengen Coordination in all the cities where MSs have their consular representations (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Recife, Curitiba, Salvador, Belem, Fortaleza and Belo Horizonte). Since 2013 there have been no LSC meetings outside Brasilia. There has been EU Consular meetings organized by MS in preparation for the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Recife. One of the next challenges for the EU DEL is to focus on the two most numerous and active Consulates in Brazil: Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

From March 2016 to April 2017 five LSC meetings were held in the capital Brasilia in the following dates:

March 2016, May 2016, July 2016, September 2016, November 2016. There were no meetings during the first five months of 2017.

The LSC group always meets at the EU Delegation in Brasilia and normally is well-attended by MS (around 80%). In 2016 there was a record on the number of meetings organized, totalling six, with well diversified topics and guest speakers. As a result, there has been an increase on the number of meetings per year and the online threads to discuss visa and other consular matters. There is active participation and a great interest on behalf of MS. LSC meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation. Minutes are drafted by EU Delegation and shared for comments with MS. Any further follow up is dealt with by the chair. MSs draft their own reports to their capitals. EU Delegation reports are then sent to the Visa Committee.

Ad-hoc meetings are organized in São Paulo by member states, and at least once a year they deal with visa-related issues. Last one took place in April 2017 in the German General Consulate in São Paulo.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement, Schengen visa-related problems do not constitute a major issue in the local consular work. VIS was fully implemented in Brazil. The requirement for collecting biometric details means that in some cases, visa applicants need to travel further to ensure this requirement.

MSs apply different exchange rates and also update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals, which makes it impossible to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees are not significant and they do not lead to visa shopping.

The issue of treatment of EU nationals entering Brazil is regularly the object of criticisms towards BR authorities. Specific cases of questionable refusals upon arrival in Brazil and a lack of familiarity with diplomatic, service passports and the EU laissez-passer were raised. Often these would occur due to a clear lack of training of immigration officers, however in general it can be stated that BR authorities comply with the VWA.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Work was finalized and the harmonisation exercise concluded during this period. MS are currently monitoring the harmonisation of practices. So far there is no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC group is working very well. EU DEL regularly updates Member States on Schengen *aquis* and all legal developments in this area taking place in Brussels. The EU DEL has been responsible for compiling local statistics for the worldwide statistics exercise, which has been successfully finalized. EU DEL is also responsible for distributing data bases of EU MS consular offices in Brazil, as well as any other relevant Schengen information.

Almost all the MSs maintain regular working contacts between themselves (partly thanks to their close cooperation in consular issues). The EU DEL is included in the exchange of consular information between the MS, both in Schengen and in consular issues. Statistics are exchanged on an ad hoc basis.

The flow of information between MS Embassies and Consulates located outside Brasilia is not always ideal. The EU Delegation, upon request, shares information with the consular offices outside the capital.

Tentative of possible visa shopping and cases of fraud documents are also shared between all MS and EU Delegation. Some MS have observed that changes in the modus operandi from various visa sections are quickly noticed by local community and spread around. This information turns out to be relevant for third national in Brazil, in their attempts to use visa shopping or some causes of fake documents, especially financial statements.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges in 2016-2017

EU Delegation and the MS consular officers have been receiving numerous questions from Brazilian nationals about a possibility to remain as a tourist within different Schengen States for more than 90 days (which is not possible under the EU-Brazil Schengen visa waiver agreement). In Brazil, in principle, the period of stay of EU citizens cannot be extended either (number of EU citizens of various nationalities were denied extension beyond 90 days and the Foreign Ministry Immigration Division argued reciprocity with the Schengen Area). On the other hand, there were also cases of EU citizens, who had the initial 90-day period renewed by the Brazilian Police for another 90 days (which seems to indicate a case by case approach).

For the next reporting period, a challenge would be to coordinate better with the LSC in locations outside Brasilia. There are a large number of MS with consular offices outside the capital and some of them – Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo-, with larger numbers in terms of visas and Schengen-related issues, than in Brasilia.

5. Other issues

The Schengen group in Brasilia is composed of 24 Members and it is a very heterogeneous group in terms of acquaintance with Schengen *acquis*. Since the visa waiver programme is working fine and no major problems arise, MS tend to focus more on consular protection.

This report has been prepared by the EU Delegation in Brazil. Members of the EU Schengen group have been invited to comment on the draft and their suggestions were included in the document.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BEIJING, CHINA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) has a strong presence in China with representation of Schengen States encompassing a total of 71 consulates.

All 28 EU Member States and 25 Schengen States are represented in Beijing². 22 Schengen States have consulates in Shanghai, 12 have consulates in Guangzhou, and several also have consulates in Chengdu (5), Wuhan (1), Shenyang (2) and Chongqing (4).

Four external service providers (TLS Contact, VFS Global, BLS and VisaMetric) are used by several Schengen States for the collection of visa applications. 24 Schengen states have outsourced the collection of visa applications in Beijing. 23 Schengen states are using outsourcing in Shanghai, 19 in Guangzhou, 18 in Chengdu, 16 in Shenyang, 16 in Wuhan and 13 in Chongqing. Schengen States also continued opening Visa Application Centres (VACs) in cities without consular presence. In April 2017, there were over 240 VACs by 23 Schengen States³.

In 2016, the overall demand for Schengen visas in China dropped for the first time ever (-8.2%) following the record set in 2015, however a number of Schengen States noted increase in applications. The number of visa applications reached 2,185,927 compared to 2,383,818 last year. Schengen countries issued 2,110,103 visas. The refusal rate increased to 3,1% (from 2,8 in 2015). Still, China accounted for 15% of the total share of Schengen visa issued worldwide. The share of multiple entry visas (MEV) almost doubled on 2015 and reached 33,9%.

For comparison, the US reported 2,125,870 visas (down from 2,446,917 in 2015). The UK issued 581,758 visas, a 18% increase on the previous year. Australia's figures reached in 2015-16, 813,000 visitor visas for Chinese nationals (tourism and business - the one most comparable to Schengen).

China has signed reciprocal visa waiver agreements for various types of passports with 130 countries. Altogether, 16 countries and regions have unilaterally allowed Chinese citizens with ordinary passports to visit without a visa and another 38 countries and regions have granted unilateral visa-on-arrival policies to Chinese citizens with ordinary passports. Last year, according to MFA, 137 million outbound visits were made by Chinese citizens. However, not a single EU member state was under the top ten destinations.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

³ List of VACs in annex.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

The LSC continued to convene approximately once a month. LSC meetings are generally well-attended. Non-EU Schengen States: Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are regularly present, too. The calendar of LSC meetings is established at the beginning of each Presidency.

The LSC is chaired by the EU delegation, which is also in charge of drawing up reports.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The work of LSC in 2016 should be seen in the light of the finalisation of the 1st phase of the migration and mobility roadmap, including the provisional application (and subsequent entry into force) of the Visa Waiver Agreement for diplomatic passport holders (VWA), as well as the opening of Visa Application Centres (VAC) in the authorised Chinese cities without member states' consular presence.

On VACs, Member States continued rolling-out the network of VACs, without any major concerns. One Member State collected fingerprints by the means of mobile kits – a move authorised by MFA, with only diplomats allowed to take fingerprints. In the context of the upcoming 2nd phase of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue (MMD), the EU delegation invited Member States to start reflection – together with national authorities - on their wishes for any additional VACs, to be communicated to European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs timely in the process.

On VWA, initial obstacles since the provisional application in March 2016 (VWA formally entered into force in January 2017) were in their majority linked to a lack of information on the agreement. Individual problems involved air companies at boarding (including European) and hotels at check-in in China. After one year of application the LSC agreed that the implementation – notwithstanding very few individual cases - could generally be seen as unproblematic.

During the reporting period the LSC confronted temporary initiatives by Chinese visa authorities (requirement to provide old passports, profiling), resulting in cases where visas had been issued, but a person not allowed entering China, or where visas had been refused without any explanation. A number of Member States informed about persisting problems with visas/entry stamps from certain non-EU countries. The scale of the incidents was rather low and having discussed different options, the LSC decided not to take any steps.

Early in 2017, China introduced possibility of fingerprinting of “certain categories of applicants” at the time of visa application. Information from MFA had reached a number of Member States on an extremely short notice (one day). So far, however, the LSC did not take note of any negative impact of the new procedures.

Shortly after, China introduced the practice of fingerprinting travellers at border-crossings. The new regulation would be gradually rolled out at all checkpoints across the country, as China aims to collect the fingerprints of all foreigners aged between 14 and 70 entering the country.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In March 2015 the LSC proposed further facilitation measures. However, at the time, the initiative was not supported by Visa Committee. On several occasions, the LSC noted its ongoing interest in the issue, also in the context of the launch of negotiations on a Visa Facilitation Agreement.

3.3 Exchange of information

Visa statistics

Submission of visa statistics continues to remain an issue also over this the reporting period. While certain Member States provide regular monthly updates, others lag behind. As a result, the ability of the EU delegation to make reliable analyses did not improve over 2016/2017.

Combatting illegal migration

Member States noted good cooperation at the political level (MMD), but pointed out to difficulties in the implementation of combatting illegal migration in practice. In particular, difficulties are with getting China's replies to requests for identification, as well as with the issuance of travel documents by Chinese consulates. Member States noted growing trends of fake accompanying documents provided in the visa application process, especially bank statements.

In this context, the LSC noted Ministry of Public Security (MPS) wish for return controls by certain EU MS consulates to be dropped - as a routine, certain visa sections check the Chinese exit/entrance stamps in the Chinese travellers' passports to prove that they have returned on time. Large majority of Member States noted the usefulness of return controls as a means of controlling illegal migration.

Migration and Mobility Support Project

The LSC received regular updates on the activities of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) under the Migration and Mobility Support Project, financed by the Partnership Instrument, as well as invitations to activities under the Work Programme. Recent examples of activities include a training seminar for visa sections on document verification techniques, specifically on detection techniques of fake, or fraudulent, Chinese bank statements. The training gathered 54 participants from almost all EU Member States and all non-EU Schengen States' visa sections. IOM also facilitated a "Technical meeting on latest trends in anti-document and identity fraud" between Member States Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) and Chinese officials from the Document Examination Centre of the Bureau of Exit and Entry Examination (BEEA) of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS).

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC held a round table discussion on the existing resident permit schemes offered by a number of Member States, which may have influence on cross-border travel in the Schengen area. Chinese citizens are among the groups most frequently interested in participating in such schemes. Over 90% of cases involve investment in real estate, also in specifically issued bonds. There are, however, differences between Member States as far as amounts to be

invested are concerned and whether participation in such schemes may lead to obtaining citizenship.

4. Challenges

The EU and China held the 3rd EU-China Mobility and Migration Dialogue (MMD) on 17 May 2016 and took stock of the successful finalisation of the 1st phase of the roadmap. They also launched the 2nd phase and established expectations in relation to the main deliverables (namely, the negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement (VFA) and the negotiation on an agreement on cooperation in combating illegal migration, as well the opening of further Visa Application Centres and continued regular expert meetings on illegal migration).

Following the recent adoption of negotiating directives on VFA by Council, the EU and China will soon start negotiations under the 2nd phase of the MMD roadmap. This will remain the priority issue for the LSC for next year.

5. Other issues

The LSC noted increase in numbers of Chinese asylum seekers in the EU Member States, with few asylum applications made at the consulates. The LSC also took note of a recent judgement of the Court of Justice of the European Union in case C-638/16 PPU.

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS
ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) Brazzaville
RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017**

1. Introduction

Trois Etats membres ont des ambassadeurs résidents à Brazzaville : Allemagne, France et Italie. L'Allemagne ne délivre pas de visas Schengen.

Trois entités délivrent les visas Schengen en République du Congo:

- la section consulaire de l'ambassade d'Italie à Brazzaville,*
- la section consulaire de l'ambassade de France à Brazzaville,*
- le consulat général de France à Pointe Noire,*

La France a signé en 2007 un accord qui dispense les porteurs de passeports diplomatiques de visa Schengen. Le Portugal a signé un accord de même type en 2014. L'Italie a reçu une demande pour la dispense de visas sur passeports diplomatiques et de service qui est à l'étude.

La France délivre des visas en représentation de l'Allemagne, l'Autriche, la Belgique, l'Espagne, la Grèce, la Lituanie, le Luxembourg, Malte, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal et la République tchèque. Depuis sa demande en 2015, la Belgique est consultée systématiquement pour les visas « artistes » « médicaux » et « en vue de mariage ».

L'Italie délivre des visas en représentation de la Suède, de la Slovaquie et de la Slovénie.

La Suisse est le seul Etat membre de l'espace Schengen à délivrer des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville à partir de son ambassade à Kinshasa. Ce cas s'explique par le fait que la Suisse n'a pas signé d'accord de représentation.

Etats Schengen ni présents ni représentés : Danemark, Estonie, Finlande, Hongrie, Islande, Lettonie, Liechtenstein, Norvège et Pologne.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2016-2017

Le rythme est annuel : réunion de la délégation, de la France et de l'Italie en septembre 2016. Depuis, la délégation a pris le relai de cette coopération en 2015. La coordination hors capitale n'est pas nécessaire : la France rend compte de l'activité de son consulat général à Pointe-Noire. Les Etats représentés pour les visas à Brazzaville avec ambassade à Kinshasa peuvent s'associer aux réunions. Il est possible d'inscrire le sujet aux réunions mensuelles des Chefs de mission.

¹ Avril 2016 – Mars 2017

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les deux EM qui délivrent des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville sur le territoire du Congo-Brazzaville ont une parfaite connaissance de leurs obligations en matière de coopération au titre du Code. Ils échangent leurs informations de manière fluide.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Les EM présents considèrent que l'harmonisation des pratiques est déjà réalisée Prenant en compte les remarques du comité Visa (réunion du 28 octobre 2016) un projet de liste simplifiée a été transmis au siège pour nouvel examen par le Comité Visa.

3.3 Echange d'informations

Entre les EM à Brazzaville, l'information circule de manière informelle et régulière en ce qui concerne les documents non fiables et les cas particuliers

Les EM à Brazzaville fournissent leurs statistiques à la délégation (à sa demande) et leurs capitales à la Commission. Chaque Etat qui délivre en représentation d'un autre Etat fournit des statistiques à ce dernier à sa demande.

Des compagnies d'assurances sérieuses offrent des prestations conformes au code. Il peut y avoir des contentieux car ces compagnies ne prennent pas en charge les soins pour des maladies que les demandeurs avaient avant de partir.

4. Défis

4.1. Lutte contre la fraude

La fraude est très répandue. Tous les dossiers demandent une étude attentive ce qui exige beaucoup de temps. Les faux documents sont de tous types : actes d'état-civil, diplômes, contrats de travail, relevés bancaires, lettres d'invitation, etc. Des officines de fabrication de dossiers complets de faux ont pignon sur rue. La France et l'Italie sont conscientes de la situation et continuent à s'échanger des informations pertinentes.

4.2. Passeports de service

La direction générale de l'immigration a pour instruction de délivrer automatiquement un passeport de service à toute personne qui en fait la demande sur la base d'une note de présentation signée par un ministre et d'un ordre de mission. La qualité d'agent de l'Etat n'est pas requise. La mission confiée à la personne n'a parfois aucune relation avec son expérience professionnelle.

5. Divers

Les faibles ressources disponibles au sein des EM et de la délégation en 2016 ont été largement sollicitées par la concertation que la DUE Brazza a lancée avec les missions

diplomatiques des like minders en RDC (et la DUE à Kinshasa) afin de définir les plans d'urgence et d'évacuation des citoyens européens vers Brazzaville en cas d'insécurité persistante en RDC. Ces efforts ont débouché sur la signature par les autorités de Brazzaville d'une dizaine d'accords réglant les modalités d'accueil des ressortissants européens en République du Congo.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) QUITO-ECUADOR 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

This is the sixth report on Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) produced in Ecuador.

The following Member States have Embassies in Ecuador: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom. Spain has General Consulates in Quito and Guayaquil. The other Member States present maintain a consular section within the Embassy. The Swiss Embassy takes part in LSC.

For matters relating to uniform Schengen visas, the Spanish General Consulate in Quito represents the Czech Republic, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta and Portugal throughout Ecuador and also represents the consular interests of Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands. The Spanish General Consulate in Guayaquil represents the consular interests of Finland, Lithuania and the Netherlands. The management of visa applications, including appointments, collection of documentation and prior electronic processing of applications, and the provision of documentation to applicants, is carried out by BLS International, an external service provider, under the contract awarded in October 2016 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain.

The consular section of the Italian Embassy in Ecuador has also outsourced the management of its visas, including appointments, collection of documentation and prior electronic processing of applications, to VSF Global.

The consular section of the German Embassy in Ecuador represents Austria, while the consular section of the French Embassy in Ecuador represents Belgium and the Swiss Embassy in Ecuador represents Latvia, Poland and Slovenia (since August 2016).

The EU Delegation in Ecuador ceased to be dependent on the Delegation of Colombia in September 2016 with the arrival of a Head of Delegation responsible solely for Ecuador.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Between April 2016 and March 2017, three regular LSC meetings were held (13/05/2016, 07/12/2016 and 23/02/2017). The meetings were attended by all the European Union Embassies/Consulates present in Ecuador, plus Switzerland and two representatives of the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation organised and chaired these meetings and drafted reports. No LSC meetings were held outside Quito.

¹ April 2016-March 2017

3. Current situation

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The exchanges of information and the coordination between the Consuls on matters relating to the Visa Code and its application are satisfactory. During the drafting of this report, the Member States present raised the following issues:

- Issuing of visas (C1-C5): Member States apply the Code differently; for example, some Member States automatically grant C5 visas to spouses of their own nationals.
- Requirement for the applicant to attend in person: although the Visa Code makes provision for new visa applications not to be lodged in person, in practice this provision is difficult to implement due to technical and resource-related issues.
- Visas for spouses: some Member States require the marriage certificate to be registered and certified in the European spouse's country of origin. Other Member States accept a marriage certificate issued by the Ecuadorian national authorities with an official stamp.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

As anticipated, the work to harmonise the list of requirements, which began in 2015, was carried out throughout the report period, based on an EU Delegation proposal and with comments by the Member States. This work was completed in March 2017 with the submission of a proposal for a harmonised list to the Council.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The regular Schengen meetings are a good opportunity for Member States to exchange information and promote harmonised practices.

3.4 Exchange of information

- Statistics: in July 2016 and at the beginning of 2017, the EU Delegation consolidated the six-monthly statistics from the Member States on the issuing of Schengen visas. Spain no longer takes part in this exercise. In the forthcoming period, the twice-yearly exchanges are set to continue.
- Cases of fraud: the number of cases of fraud has increased, as have irregularities and forged documents in relation to bank accounts, medical insurance and travel itineraries. In particular, it has been found that a significant proportion of 'tours' in Europe are fictitious and designed to conceal the true destination or purpose of travel ('visa shopping').
- VIS: while the aim of the new system is undoubtedly to facilitate processing, the Member States report that it is impractical, as they are unable to see the rejected applications until the end of the process and this delays the entire process of granting the visa. They agree that it would have been more practical to carry on physically stamping passports.
- Medical insurance (frequent problems with insurance companies that do not provide a good service): the Member States feel that, although it would be useful to have a reference list of insurers who are either unreliable or have caused problems or

provided poor service, producing such a list is extremely difficult. One-off exchanges of information between Member States offer a good solution to mitigate the problem.

3.5 Other LSC initiatives

In December 2016 the EU Delegation organised a joint meeting on Schengen with the US Embassy (and its Criminal Investigation Office), accompanied by two members of the Anti-Crime Investigation Unit (UIADC in Spanish) of Ecuador's National Police to exchange information on fraud and scams, specifically in relation to documentation when applying for visas. Important issues were raised, including the Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) and programme statistics. A number of ideas were put forward that are potentially useful and applicable for effective cooperation with the Member States, such as: cross-training on fraud detection, an anti-fraud campaign, and the creation of a group to exchange relevant information via mail or other means. The EU Delegation remains in touch with the Embassy of the United States to explore future collaborations of mutual interest.

In January 2017, the EU Delegation teamed up with the local newspaper 'La Hora' to publish FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on the issue of Schengen visas in order to inform the Ecuadorian public more accurately and to clarify possible misunderstandings.

4. Challenges

At the time of the ratification and entry into force of the EU-Ecuador Trade Agreement on 1 January 2017, several articles and statements appeared in the press relating to the issue of agreement on visa exemptions. The Member States agreed to take a specific line on this issue. The EU, in each of its interventions, reiterated the importance of keeping the two themes separate and clarified the current situation as far as possible. During the current year there has been a marked increase in visa applications from companies and importers/exporters.

5. Miscellaneous

On 19 February 2015, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility submitted a formal request for the European Commission to lift the Schengen visa requirement for Ecuadorian citizens wishing to travel to the Schengen area. This requirement was first introduced in 2003. This issue is extremely important to the Ecuadorian Government due to the fact that its neighbours Colombia and Peru have been exempt from the requirement since 2015 and 2016 respectively and in view of the EU-Ecuador Trade Agreement that came into force on 1 January 2017.

All the Embassies/Consulates involved in Local Schengen Cooperation have approved this Report.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT

EU COORDINATION

15 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the Arab Republic of Egypt

2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The European Union Delegation to Egypt coordinated the Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) between Schengen Member States in Egypt throughout the year. Local Schengen Cooperation meetings were held four times and were convened and chaired by the EU Delegation, while Consular Cooperation meetings were organized back to back with the LSC and chaired by the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta chaired the Consular Cooperation group during the reporting period.

Apart from Luxembourg, which is represented by Belgium, all EU Schengen Member States are represented in Cairo. All Schengen Member States, including Norway and Switzerland, are part of the group. During the reporting period, all Schengen Member States attended the group's meetings.

As foreseen by the Visa Code, Local Schengen Cooperation sought to ensure a harmonised application of the common visa policy taking into account, where appropriate, local circumstances.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

As recommended by the Visa code, the LSC meetings took place four times (18 May 2016, 26 September 2016, 21 November 2016 and 1 March 2017) and were all well attended. Consuls General or their deputies are normally representing their respective embassies.

All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation to the Arab Republic of Egypt (DCM and political counsellor).

On 18th May, the Czech embassy organized an anti-fraud meeting aimed at sharing best practises and experiences.

On 5th June, the Austrian embassy organised in Cairo an additional anti-fraud meeting where an expert from Vienna gave a presentation.

On 13th February, the EUDEL hosted a visa training aimed at providing a general overview on document security. This training was provided by Mr Balazs Kunt, visa expert, presently working in the Hungarian embassy in Nairobi.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

The EU Delegation drafted the agenda for each meeting, drafted and circulated the minutes (via the Agora network), and collected the information needed for coordination efforts.

As for the past, coordination with Member States represented by a Consulate-General in Alexandria (France, Greece, UK and Spain) took place. These Consulate-Generals were included in the mailing list of the EU Delegation and therefore received the same information as the Consulates in Cairo.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU Delegation to Egypt chaired and provided the secretariat to the group. The EU Delegation liaised regularly with the European Commission (DG HOME) in order to exchange views on a variety of issues relating to the community code on visas and to clarify issues, as needed.

In general, the members of the LSC did not raise major concerns about the implementation of the Visa Code. However, discussions *inter alia* took place on the possibility to add a new questionnaire to the existing one (Annex I), cf. below. LSC members also raised a number of practical issues relating to their day by day work in Egypt that will be described further in this report.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

As for the previous LSC annual report, the harmonised list of supporting documents was adopted by the Visa Committee in November 2011 and subsequently adopted by the European Commission on 27 February 2012. It entered into force on 1 March 2012. The LSC group also translated the list into Arabic. The LSC group, upon request of a MS, held discussions on the possibility to introduce at the local level an additional harmonised set of questions for the visa applicants. In fact, some MS representatives see the need to have additional information (personal data) available at least for the processing of the first visa request, whereas others prefer to keep the process as it is. At the end of the reporting period, the LSC group decided that it would seek to agree on a consolidated set of questions which would then be submitted to the EU competent services for validation, subsequent to consultation with capitals. EUDEL in an initial reaction took the view that any such questionnaire risked infringing the Visa Code which only foresees Annex I as the set of questions to be answered by the visa applicants

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

So far, no attempts have been made to harmonise visa-issuing practices, such as the issuing of long-validity MEVs.

Based on the information received from the Schengen Member States, the average length of validity of Multiple Entry Visas is of twelve months. Therefore the large majority of the MEVs issued are 1-year MEVs, whereas the average percentage of 2-3-4-5 years MEVs issued is very low.

3.4 Exchange of information

- **Monthly statistics** (visa applications/issuances): LSC MS exchanged information and discussed the matter at each meeting. During the first part of the reporting period, MS noticed an increase of applications and the global number of visas increased proportionally. Conversely, during the second part of the year the number of applications decreased significantly, mainly due to the drastic fall down of the EGP (the €/EGP exchange rate went down from 10 EGP to almost 20 EGP for one €). The profile of the applicants also changed accordingly, with a vast majority of requests at the end of the reporting period coming from wealthy persons or people travelling for business purposes. The EUDEL collected and centralized the visa statistics sent by Member States on a regular basis. MS are using the jointly agreed template which provides figures for the requests and the actual issuance of A/C/LTV/ D visas. The consolidated quarterly visa statistics are regularly sent to the EU Commission (DG HOME) and also shared among Schengen countries locally.
- **Outsourcing to private companies:** A vast majority of MS are now using the facilities of specialised private companies such as TLS to process the visa applications. Albeit with some nuances, all MS affirmed to be satisfied with the services provided by the private companies.
- **Cases of fraud.** The LSC group covered this topic at each meeting since the phenomenon remains prominent. Consulates are confronted with a range of issues, including "white marriages", fake bank accounts, fake medical certificates, fake hotel reservations and/or vouchers. Several consulates were receiving suspicious verbal notes, from Egyptian ministries or from embassies of instable Arab countries. "Visa shopping" was still a frequent phenomenon, but thanks to the exchange of information is easily detected by consular staff. Some MS took the view that the setting-up of a single Schengen visa centre could help bring down the number of cases of "visa-shopping". Several cases of groundless requests of visas for family reunification were also reported. The Group had extensive discussions on the long-lasting phenomenon of the "white marriages". The Group realised that criteria for evaluating a potential "white marriage" were not always clear and that interpretations were not always the same. Some MS observed that the number of suspicious marriages increased and that although interviews are regularly set to verify if they are genuine or not, it is often difficult to substantiate and to prove the irregularity of the process. It was also noted that even if a fabricated marriage was clearly detected (eg. spouses not knowing each other or not speaking the same language), consulates were often lacking legal means to prevent them from happening.
- **Blacklisted persons and suspicious applications.** MS regularly exchanged information by e-mail on "blacklisted" applicants and suspicious visa applications. Some MS keep a "permanent black list", while others, mainly for internal data protection policy reasons, have to destroy that list. MS noted that, according to the visa code, persons who were not granted a visa in reply to their request, cannot be prevented from presenting a new visa request immediately after the rejection.
- **Travel Medical Insurance (TMI):** There were no new requests from companies for inclusion in the list of the bodies authorised to provide TMI in conformity with the visa code. There were no complaints against insurance companies offering adequate TMI. In

two occasions, one TMI company complained about the fact in certain cases its insurance product was not accepted, however, after examination, it was ascertained that the complaint didn't provide sufficient elements and information. No more complaints were signalled.

- **Use of VIS email:** This communication tool has been very rarely used amongst consulates. Only two MS declared having used it once during the reporting period. Some MS complaining the visa email being too slow compared to regular emails.
- **Visas applications of spouses of EU citizens:** The Group held a discussion whether or not spouses would be given the possibility to travel to other countries of the Schengen area in addition to the country for which they request a visa. A diversity of approaches was noted. However it was recalled that the principle of free movement of citizens is applicable to all EU citizens, including the spouses of EU citizens
- **Acceptable minimum financial means to be submitted by applicants**
- There is a certain divergence of approaches among Schengen countries, with some countries deciding on a "case by case" basis and others applying a strict minimum of 10.000 EGP (550€) to be held on the account.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None.

4. Challenges

LSC meetings will continue to discuss local cooperation issues, as foreseen by the Visa Code.

5. Other issues

None



10 / 05 / 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ETHIOPIA 2016-17 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is a regional hub in Africa with Ethiopian Airlines having connections to 57 African countries and with direct flights to an increasing number of European destinations. The EU embassies in Ethiopia have to deal with a large number of family reunification and visa requests from citizens from neighbouring countries, including Eritrea. Meanwhile, the EU is engaging with Ethiopia on migration issues; the high risk of irregular migration and human trafficking and the lack of effective cooperation on returns has to be taken into account when granting visas. In October 2016, political unrest led to the declaration of the State of Emergency for 6 months, which was extended by 4 months in April 2017. This political turmoil, combined with high population growth and regional refugee flows, are having an impact on visa services. Some high level officials expect special treatment in visa matters which makes it sometimes difficult to enforce the rules. In general, dialogue and technical cooperation with Ethiopian administration, including the immigration services, is very challenging. Ethiopia suffers from poor internet connections and deliberate internet cuts by the Government in the context of the State of Emergency, electricity problems and cultural and language barriers. Recently, the EU embassies have a noted increase in numbers of Schengen visa applications referring to the free movement of persons in Europe. The African Union requests official visas for its personnel and family members even in the cases where there is no official engagement in Europe, and this is seen as an abuse of diplomatic rules.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-17

21 EU Member States are present in Addis Abeba, which makes the LSC cooperation very relevant and important to ensure coherent application of the rules. Norway and Switzerland are also present. The EU Delegation is chairing the regular LSC meetings on average every two months. The LSC meetings are well attended by the interested embassies and there are lively exchanges of information and experiences. So far, there were no ad hoc meetings with third parties, but this could be considered in the future.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU embassies are eager to ensure a correct application of the Visa Code despite many difficulties and in the context of an ever increasing number of Schengen visa applications referring to the free movement of persons in Europe. The main difficulties are: 1) limited staff

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

in visa sections, in particular experts and qualified local staff; 2) technical efficiency problems with the Visa Information System (VIS); 3) complicated cases and incomplete applications submitted by Ethiopians, which requires important time investment at the visa office; 4) frequent lack of correct understanding of some questions in the visa forms; 5) risk of document fraud, "visa shopping" and attempts of irregular migration; 6) increasing numbers of overstaying and asylum cases; 7) difficulty of finding reliable translators and interpreters in the context of a multi-ethnic country; 8) lack of effective cooperation with Ethiopian authorities, including frequent turnover of Ethiopian administration staff and non-uniform application of Ethiopian rules; 9) political pressure of high officials to obtain visas without following the due procedure; and 10) the lack of effective cooperation in return and readmission of irregular migrants.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The EU embassies have recognised the need for coherent communication about the Schengen visa requirements. The final decision on the Harmonised List Ethiopia is expected by summer 2017.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EU embassies are sharing information about the statistics in a form of a table. The 2016 statistics table is under preparation. There are also regular exchanges about the VIS implementation and other matters of common interest via email and other means of communication. There is also an active Fraud Working Group and joint trainings organised by various partners in Ethiopia.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

There are many ideas on how to improve cooperation. Norway is coordinating discussions about possible outsourcing to the VFS and some MS are interested to explore cooperation in this area. It would also be useful to compile a list of quality translators in local Ethiopian languages who could be used by various embassies. It would also be useful to organise a dialogue with the African Union protocol about their practice of issuing official visa requests for family members etc. without genuine official engagements in Europe.

4. Challenges

Given the numerous challenges faced by the EU embassies in the application of the Visa Code in Ethiopia, the LSC group intends to enhance its cooperation in many areas. The main concrete challenge is to ensure coherent use of the Harmonised List after its final approval in Visa Committee in Brussels, expected in the very near future.

5. Other issues

In general, it is useful to consider simplification of the visa forms globally to reduce the cases of misunderstood questions.



15 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in GEORGIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

There are 14 Schengen MS present in Tbilisi (13 EU² and Switzerland). Additionally, Bulgaria and Romania participate in the LSC meetings. UK is invited to participate and they do so in case a point on the agenda is relevant to UK.

The current representation agreements are as follows:

- Switzerland represents Austria
- The Netherlands represent Belgium, Luxemburg, Spain
- Estonia represents Denmark
- Germany represents Finland, Portugal
- Latvia represents Hungary, Sweden
- Lithuania represents Slovakia
- Italy represents Malta
- Poland represents Slovenia
- France represents Iceland, Norway

Cyprus is covered by its Consulate in Ukraine or Armenia.

4 MS outsource collection of applications to an external service provider; their experience so far is very positive and helps reduce the waiting times.

Local circumstances relevant for visa issuing:

- Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements between the EU and Georgia are in force since March 2011.
- Following the proposal of the European Commission on 9 March 2016 to allow visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Georgian citizens holding a biometric passport, the visa-free regime eventually entered into force on 28 March 2017. Visa liberalisation (and its postponement) was one of the main topics for the society during this period.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

3 LSC meetings were held in the reporting period. Meetings are well attended. EUDEL chairs the meetings and also prepares the first draft of the meeting report.

Main points for discussions included: trends in visa applications (including an increasing number of visa applications from foreigners residing in Georgia), preparation for the entry into force of visa liberalisation, procedures applied to processing visa applications from

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden

children who have one EU citizen parent, state of play of visa applications lodged by the residents of the breakaway regions, consular issues related to surrogacy cases, arrests of EU citizens due to possession of prohibited medicines.

LSC meetings take place only in the capital where all Consulates are located.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The level of cooperation between MS and the EUDEL within the LSC remain stable and good. Consulate-to-Consulate exchanges are well established and promoted within the group.

There was particularly close cooperation in the run-up to the introduction of visa-liberalisation, including MS sharing on their social media sites the campaign material prepared by the EU. The decision on visa liberalisation was announced at a joint press conference, with the participation of Commissioner Avramopoulos, the Head of EUDEL and all Schengen / EU MS ambassadors. EUDEL regularly shares with the MS relevant information, including about relevant websites or some publication, leaflets.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonized list of supporting documents was adopted on 29 April 2014. MS do not see the need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

With some difference between MS and based on the information received, +/- 90% of multiple entry visas (MEVs) were issued for a validity of 1 year. The share of 2-year MEVs was +/- 7%, 3-, 4- and 5-year MEVs were below or around 1% respectively.

3.4 Exchange of information

Monthly statistics' exchange continues well thanks to the dedication of the Dutch and Estonian colleague, who volunteered to collect the statistics for the reporting period. Some MS encounter delays in providing relevant information.

MS continue to exchange information on Visa Code compliant travel medical insurance, falsified supporting documents, visa refusals and false visa stickers. MS reported that the implementation of the Visa Information System was completed; the use of VISMail was irregular.

MS kept informing each-other about the recognition of Status Neutral Travel Documents; no change was reported compared to the state-of-play of last year (8 MS: BG, EE, PL, CZ, SV, LV, LT, RO recognise the SNTDs).

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

1. Response to challenges listed in the 2015-2016 report

The issue of visa-liberalisation was discussed at all LSC meetings, in particular the one preceding the entry into force of the visa-free regime, which focused on the information campaign for GE citizens about the new regime. EUDEL shared with MS the information leaflet prepared for this occasion (both in English and Georgian) and MS shared on their social media the campaign elements developed by the EU.

2. Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2017-2018).

LSC will pay close attention to visa developments after visa liberalisation, including statistics on overstay or number of asylum requests.

5. Other issues

n/a

Drafted by EUDEL

Approved by MS in Tbilisi

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Accra, Ghana 2016-2017 REPORT^[1]

1. Introduction

In Ghana eight Member States are issuing Schengen visas: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. France has an embassy but is represented by the Netherlands. Hungary has opened an embassy last year but is still represented by The Netherlands for visa matters. The table in Annex summarises the situation of Schengen Area countries, their responsibilities and representations.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

LSC meetings are held monthly at the EU Delegation and are generally well attended. Meetings until September 2016 were chaired by the EU Delegation and meetings since 13th of October 2016 were co-chaired by the RSCO¹. The UK is seldom present as observer. Agenda and Minutes of meetings are prepared and shared with Member States prior to the next meeting and afterwards by the EU Delegation with DG Home. Specifically info on fraud, trends and statistics have been earmarked as recurrent topics for each LSC agenda.

The UK is occasionally present as an observer to exchange information on issues relating to visas.

In January 2017 a subgroup² of MS was formed to work on provisions of Article 48 of the Visa Code to further enhance local Schengen cooperation. Two meetings were held in March 2017 to create a common list of visa requirements for all MS. Additional meetings are scheduled for coming period.

On the 8th of March 2017 following the successful meeting last year, DK organised a special seminar with banking institutions (inviting commercial banks and Bank of Ghana). The seminar was about fraud prevention and detection of bank statements in the visa process and was well attended by many MS and some non-EU/Schengen missions. The goal was to be informed about the different security features of their bank statements and to have an updated list of contact persons in case of verification of bank statements presented in visa applications.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Member States are well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on different kinds of visa matters. Only three MS (CZ, DE, NL) do not outsource the receipt of visa applications, all other MS work with one of the external service providers VFS, TLS and BLS in Accra. One MS³ relies on a regional centre for visa decisions. All MS (except CZ, who introduced a new E-appointment system) recorded an increase in the number of

^[1] April 2016 – March 2017

¹ RSCO= Regional Schengen Coordinating Officer – project funded by the Internal Security Fund of the EU

² Subgroup consist of Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and the RSCO

³ The Netherlands

applications compared to previous period. Over 28,000 applications were received by all Schengen missions in 2016; NL processed the highest number of 8,290 visa applications (incl. its representations). The visa refusal rate remains high around 35% varying from highest number by CZ (47%) to the lowest number of NL (24%).

All MS frequently use the email distribution list of LSC contacts for the rapid exchange, consultation and sharing of information on visa applications.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The subgroup of MS is in working process to harmonise provisions of Article 48 of the Visa Code.

The harmonised list of supporting documents Art 48-1(a) was approved by the MS. An overview was made on current visa fees Art 48-1(b) applied by MS; due to differences calculation of exchange rates the harmonisation of visa fees is not feasible. A list of travel documents will be drawn up Art 48 1(c) and table provided by DE on recognition of documents will be added.

A common information sheet Art 48-2 will be reviewed and presented for MS to implement in the visa process. On Art 48-3 (except for statistics) work is ongoing. Provisions of Art 48-4, 48-5 and 48-6 have been imbedded on a local level. After completion of harmonised information ref Article 48, a folder will be composed, forwarded by the EU Delegation to the Visa Committee and used by MS in their Schengen visa process.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

With the assistance of the RSCO a format to exchange of visa statistics was introduced and IT has taken up the responsibility to compile and share the statistics on a quarterly basis. DE is responsible to manage and share the local alert list for MS to report on cases of fraud and forgeries. NO has the lead on the common list of insurance companies and informs the MS on any new developments; an update of this list is foreseen in the coming period.

According to Annex VIII ad 3 of Visa Code the stamp of the issuing authorities shall be placed in such a manner that it extends beyond the visa sticker onto the page of the travel document. All MS except CH place the stamp; after consultation CH complied and this practice was harmonized.

Most MS have a special procedure for frequent travellers. A frequent traveller does not have to make an appointment, can make use of the daily walk-in procedure at a mission or with an external service provider. Some MS apply the rule that after two/three issued single entry visas and applicant can apply for a multiple entry visa (depends on reason of travel). In terms of validity a C1 or C2 (one or two years MEV) is the norm. Spouses of EU nationals travelling for family reasons receive a C3 or C4 visa. MEVs with 5 year validity are not issued because these visas would exceed the validity of passport presented by the visa applicant. By far longest issued MEVs are given to well-known contacts who have long term established relationship with the missions.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings have been used as a platform to exchange information on

- statistics and trends in visa applications;
- cases of fraud and forgery schemes as well as individual incidents with applicants/applications
- travel medical insurance (TMI) and update of lists of approved insurance companies
- implementation of the Visa Information System; MS operate with VIS systems based on national requirements, biometric features from EU-VIS are actively used to identify a visa applicant and to share information of applicants amongst MS who have been refused by another MS
- use of VISMail; unknown to most MS and not in use
- cooperation with external service providers
- regional visa applicants coming from neighbouring countries, modus operandi etc.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As part of the project Schengen Regional Cooperation Officer, an RSCO based in Accra⁴ joined the LSC group to assist the EU Delegation in coordinating and organising meetings. The role of the Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer is assisting the EU Delegation and all MS in improving local Schengen cooperation, sharing of best practises in his region and assisting in harmonising of documents and procedures. Together with the EU Delegation new initiatives were introduced for the LSC and have already been put into practise.

In November 2016 we organized an exchange with colleagues from Canada and Japan visa sections (US and Australia were also invited but couldn't attend) and in January 2017 we participated to a meeting on consular affairs (good practices on consular issues) with Peru, Colombia and Chile representatives (the Pacific Alliance countries). The two meetings were interesting and could be replicated in the future.

In March 2017 we invited the local IOM office to attend one of our regular meeting for a presentation (and discussion) on (im)migration routes and trends from Ghana and West Africa.

4. Challenges

A successful meeting was held with banking institutions. On consular cooperation DK has taken the responsibility to coordinate the work on behalf of all MSs for the coming period.

Fraud continues to be a major challenge. Documentary fraud remains important and in particular: use of forged bank statements or non-existing bank accounts, tampered passports and other identity documents, fake employment letters and fake hotel reservations. Financial statements from Micro Finance institutions are extremely difficult to be verified, MSs need continued support from the Bank of Ghana to assist in verification process. High risk profile categories are visa applications of artists, cultural groups, football players and other athletes. In Autumn MSs plan to organise workshops and meetings with various local authorities and organisations (Immigration, Police, Passport office, Civil Registry Office, document experts ILOS and ALOs) on the exchange of information and practises in relation to Schengen visa process.

⁴ Besides Ghana mandated for five other West African countries (Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo)

5. Other issues

After several month of collaboration with the Schengen Regional Cooperation Officer in Accra, I would like to stress that his presence and proactive contribution to the work and coordination of the group shows that an efficient coordination needs competence and direct experience, which are often missing to EU Delegation staff.

I understand that some form of training is being experimented for EU DEL colleagues, but would like to suggest re-thinking about the framework proposed for the management of LSC groups that not always guarantees satisfactory results.

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This report was prepared with the decisive contribution of the Schengen Regional Cooperation Officer, was shared with the LSC group and include their inputs and comments.

Annex to annual LSC report Ghana (2016-2017)

List of Schengen MS present or represented in Ghana and cooperation with external service providers.

The following Member States issue Schengen visas: **Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland**

<u>COUNTRIES REPRESENTING/REPRESENTED BY</u>	<u>Use of EXTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDER</u>
AT Represented by NL	No
BE Represented by CH	Yes, TLS
CZ Visa section	No
DE Visa section	No
DK Visa section	Yes, VFS
EE Represented by DE	No
EL Represented by ES	Yes, BLS
ES¹ Visa section	Yes, BLS
FI Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
FR Represented by NL	No
GR Represented by ES	Yes, BLS
HU² Represented by NL	No
IS Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
IT Visa section	Yes, VFS
LI Represented by CH	Yes, TLS
LT Represented by NL	No
LU Represented by NL	No
LV Represented by CH	Yes, TLS
MT Represented by IT	Yes, VFS
NL³ Visa section	No
PL Represented by NL	No
PT Represented by NL	No
SI Represented by ES	Yes, BLS
SK Represented by CZ	No
SE Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
CH Visa section	Yes, TLS
NO Visa section	Yes, VFS
UK⁴ Observer	

¹ Spain as of 19th of December 2016 has replaced VFS by company BLS

² Hungary may start issuing visas as of Autumn 2017

³ The Netherlands intends to outsource the visa appointment system only to VFS as of 1st of July 2017

⁴ United Kingdom has outsourced the visa process to company called TLS contact (a Teleperformance company)

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Guinea Bissau 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Only three MSs formally present in Bissau with Embassies, France, Portugal and Spain. Of those only PT and ES have consular sections. They divide Schengen consular work between themselves. No non EU Schengen State has a diplomatic or consular representation in Guinea Bissau.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

During the period, three LSC meetings were held, dedicated to sharing information on the issuance of different type visas and other Schengen procedures. Given that only two MSs have consular sections it is not difficult to have unanimous participation. No other consular coordination meetings with other States were held during the period. As of the last of these meetings other than the Head of the Political Section the Delegation is now represented also by the Head of Administration. This is not only in her remit but it also contributes to continuity of service.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is being applied by the two Mss that have a consular section within their Embassies, ES and PT. ES pointed out specifically that the Delegation omitted to provide a written report of the LSC meeting held in February 2017 – as established in article 48.5 of the EU Visa Code - which they requested formally by means of a note verbale. The Delegation proposed that in future two weeks after each LSC meeting a draft report be circulated to participants. This will need to be adopted within the month following that meeting.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Consular Sections of the ES and PT Embassies have agreed to revise their respective lists of supporting documents and compare them with a view to further harmonise them. It is still the case that each Consular Section reserves the right to ask for additional information from visa applicants as deemed necessary on a case by case basis, including personal interviews. The Delegation was assured that this is in conformity with the Visa Code.

3.3 Exchange of information

ES, PT Consular Sections noted that visa shopping is now common practice in that mostly applicants being refused by PT then turn to ES.

Similarly, ES confirmed that a significant number of applicants who know that the workload is greater at the PT Consular Section go directly to ES as time saving expedient. This is

¹ March 2016 – June 2017

especially true at this time of the year – June, July and August – when the PT Consular Section is already arranging applicants' appointments for the month of October.

In the previous period only one airline - Portugal's Euro Atlantic – flew directly to Europe, twice a week. Since TAP has re-started the Bissau to Lisbon flight adding three more flights a week. This has not caused any noticeable change in the workload of the two Consular Sections.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N.A.

4. Challenges

The ongoing political crisis is now on its 22 month. Economic growth is – on paper – reasonably high at 5%. It is however dependent on a single export commodity, cashew kernels. Given the high population growth, the unequal income distribution, high unemployment and the almost complete absence of public services to the population, the young population sees emigration as the way to a better life and the EU is the destination of choice.

5. Other issues

ES applies DNA tests to applicants in family regrouping cases under Directive 38/2004. In contrast PT cannot for lack of legal basis. ES estimate that from the tests' results, 40% of applications are made under false pretences. PT in turn, while using more traditional detection methods – interviews and cross referencing – put that number at 60% of the total.

Both ES and PT Consular Sections note an increase in the number of cases of fraud involving genuine Service Passport holders with a view to them migrating to Europe. ES estimate these cases to be as high as 3 out of every 10 applications by holders of such passports. Even if PT consider that this may be at the high end of the scale, both agree that this puts into question the legitimacy of the authorisation for such passports to officials/others by the MFA.

Number of visas issued by ES and PT Consular Sections by type for the period:

1 Jan 2016 to 31 May 2017	ES REQUESTED	ES ISSUED	PT REQUESTED	PT ISSUED
VISA A (Airport Transit)	17	17	0	0
VISA C (Holidays)	967	635	7378	5868
VISA C (EU Family Reunion)	120	15	Included in C	Included in C
VISA C (Limited Territory Visa)	9	9	These are not requested	32



12 /05/2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hong Kong and Macao 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

13 MS are present for the purpose of issuing Schengen visas; 12 in HK and 1 in Macao.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016

In 2016 LSC held 4 regular meetings+2 joint visits (police HQ and airport authority). The meetings were well attended. The meetings are chaired by Head of Political, Press and Information section of the EUO. Reports are drawn by EUO. MS share the common report with their capitals. Hong Kong and Macao being very small there is no need for coordination with the LSC in locations outside capitals.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All MS and EUO are fully prepared to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code.

No specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code were signalled in the LSC meetings.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS started implementing common list on 30 September 2016. No problems have been signalled since then and there is no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No attempts have been made to harmonise visa-issuing practices, such as the issuing of long-validity MEV. Roughly half of MS issue MEV for 2-5 years, others 1-3 years. A couple of MS issue MEVs only for 1 year with one MS stating that even this is done only exceptionally. All MS check travel history and do not issue MEV for first time entry applicants (one MS said that it might issue MEV to a first time applicant if the applicant has received visa in the past, for example, USA, Canada or Australia)

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC concerns implementation of the Visa Information System; statistics, consular protection of unrepresented EU citizens, marriages, prison visits, instructions from EU HQ as required and any other ad hoc issues.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

MS are keen on holding joint field visits. In 2016 LSC held joint visits to police HQ and the airport authority.

4. Challenges

There are no particular challenges.

LSC wants to discuss the practice of issuing Schengen visa to foreign domestic workers residing in HK.

Recently MS consulates have received many requests by their citizens to provide a certificate that they are not obliged or indeed not allowed to keep their expired passports. This is due to a new requirement in order to obtain Chinese visa. MS consulates have not been notified of the new requirement. The issue is being raised with the local MFA office.

5. Other issues

None



24 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in INDIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In India, there are currently 24 Schengen States which are not only present but also process visas. It includes 22 EU Member States, as well as two partner countries (NO and CH). IS is present in India but for visa processes is represented by DK. LI is the only Schengen State not present in India (for visas is represented by CH). Four prospective Schengen States (BG, HR, CY and RO) are also processing visas in India.

The majority of Schengen States accredited to New Delhi also cover several countries in India's immediate neighbourhood², hence frequently also process Schengen (and/or national) visas for applicants from those countries, or availing themselves of representation agreements *in loco*³.

Schengen States continued to have a robust presence in India, encompassing 44 Embassies/High Commissions and Consulates General⁴, of which 86% (38 missions) processed visas. New Delhi is the only location where all Schengen States processed visas in their respective (24) consular offices. The situation is more varied in the six locations where Schengen States have a consular presence, as some did not process visas. The widest Schengen visa office hubs outside the capital city continued to be Mumbai (7 out of 11 present processed visas)⁵, followed by Kolkata (all 3 processed visas)⁶, Bangalore (2 out of 3)⁷, Chennai (1 out of 2)⁸. FR continued to have a visa processing Consulate General in Pondicherry, while PT one in Goa.

Taking into account the geography of the sub-continent, and with a constant view to avoid disproportionate efforts by visa applicants to access their respective visa services, 21+2⁹ Schengen States continued to outsource visa-related ancillary/non-judgemental tasks to an external service provider (ESP). All but one Schengen States using an ESP in India actually use the same provider, hence in most cases visa application centres (VACs) function as Schengen "Common Application Centres", being co-located in the same building in each location (Joint VACs)¹⁰.

In order to allow greater proximity to visa applicants (a constant, reiterated concern shared by all Schengen States), throughout the reporting period, ESP network has been expanding. 12 Schengen States have over 10 locations throughout India (six States have a maximum of 16

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka (BD-BT-MV-NP-LK respectively).

³ By definition representation agreements for Schengen purposes do not include national visas.

⁴ These numbers do not include the missions of prospective Schengen EU MS (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania: BG-HR-CY-RO) nor those of EU non-Schengen countries (United Kingdom and Ireland: UK-IE).

⁵ Of the 11 Schengen States present (BE-DE-ES-FR-IT-HU-NL-PL-SE-CH-NO) only NL, SE, CH and NO do not process visas

⁶ DE-FR-IT

⁷ DE-FR yes, with CH present but not processing visas.

⁸ DE yes, with BE present but not processing visas.

⁹ BE-CZ-DK-DE-EE-EL-ES-FR-IT-LV-LU-HU-MT-NL-AT-PT-FI-SI-SE+NO-CH+IS-LI.

¹⁰ Majority of Schengen States use services of VFS Global, while ES uses services of BLS International

locations), while the remaining States have at least six. The network also expands into the neighbouring countries with 12 Schengen States issuing visas in India having the same ESP in BD (three in Dhaka), BT (four in Thimpu), NP (seven in Kathmandu) and LK (seven in Colombo, two in Jaffna).

The remaining Schengen States (LT, PL and SK) received visa applicants directly. Given the local practice, we could expect they might consider outsourcing in the coming years. This would confirm a general trend towards a steady increase of outsourcing due to the growing number of visa applications and VIS-induced network rationalisation. In addition, two of the four prospective members (HR and CY) already use an ESP in India.

In 12 months of 2016, Schengen States in India received over 793 thousand visas visa applications (airport transit + uniform C), an increase by 12% as compared to 2015, and contrary to the global decreasing trend (-1.6%). Schengen States in India continued to manage the fifth largest visa operations in the world and second as the non-neighbouring country after China. In terms of visa applications, India now trails only Russia, China, Ukraine and Turkey, and overtook Belarus and Algeria, which were ahead of India until now.

52% of all visa applications were processed in Delhi (415,6 thousand), while Mumbai was second with 236,9 thousand (30%), followed by Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, Pondicherry and Goa – for details see table below.

India - consulate location	Total Schengen visas (ATV + uniform) applied for in 2016	Change 2016/2015	Refusal rate (2016)	Share of MEVs (2016)
New Delhi	415,565	31.4%	11.0%	50.8%
Mumbai	236,888	-14.4%	4.9%	58.6%
Bangalore	69,584	21.0%	2.9%	41.8%
Kolkata	29,445	9.1%	4.7%	53.6%
Chennai	24,876	30.9%	9.3%	81.8%
Pondicherry	14,281	36.0%	11.2%	7.3%
Goa	2,651	11.2%	10.2%	9.4%
	793,290	12.0%	8.2%	57.4%

FR received the most applications in India (156.7 thousand – an increase of 16.1% as compared to 2015), followed by DE, IT and CH (each above 100 thousand). These four countries accounted for 64% of all visas applications in 2016 in India. Only four countries have seen the reduction in numbers – BE, MT, SK and CH. Not issued rate in 2016 rose substantially from 6.5% in 2015 to 8.2% in 2016, higher than the global average (6.9%). Share of Multiple-Entry Visas (MEV) in 2016 rose to 57.4% from 44.5% in 2015, thus similar to the global average (58.6%).

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

During the reporting period, there were eight LSC meetings (so-called "Plenaries"¹¹) as well as many more sub-groups¹² meetings. All meetings took place in Delhi. The LSC Plenary meetings included participation of EU and non-EU Schengen States as well as four Schengen prospective members. The LSC Plenary was chaired by the European Union Delegation (EUD), while the SG meetings were presided by the volunteer Schengen State leading the group. The LSC Plenaries focused on the application of the Visa Code as well as harmonisation exercise, while Sub-groups concentrated more on best practices' exchanges. Reports from the meetings were drawn up by the EUD and circulated to all Schengen States' missions in India.

¹¹ Open to all Schengen States' representatives.

¹² Only some Schengen States participate. For further details, see *infra* part 3.5

LSC meetings in locations outside New Delhi, notably Kolkata, Bangalore and Mumbai, were organised more on an *ad hoc* basis and were held there by rotating chairs, according to practical agreements reached locally. Reports from the LSC Plenaries taking place in New Delhi fed into the discussions in other locations. Due to the geographical distance, the representative of the EUD only occasionally participated in these meetings personally.

Since September 2016, the Schengen cooperation in India was further strengthened by the presence of a Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer (RSCO) for the duration of one year, as part of the project financed by DG HOME's Internal Security Fund Borders. The main objective of the RSCO project is strengthening the quality of the visa decision making process and local visa cooperation.

The LSC meetings often contributed to and drawn from the discussions at the other EU local cooperation meetings, notably the Local Consular Cooperation (LCC) or the Local Migration Group (LMG). LCC is presided by the EU Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU and hence the Chair changes every six months as all the EU countries are accredited to India. LCC covers all issues pertaining to consular affairs as per Vienna Convention art. 5 except short stay visa (LSC remit). LMG is chaired by the EUD and is dedicated to the cooperation on migration and mobility-related issues.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Visa Code is fully implemented in Schengen States' visa operations in India with all Schengen States prepared to carry out all the necessary tasks. The majority of Schengen States continue to advocate for further harmonisation of practices and approaches locally, despite the already achieved high level of harmonisation.

It needs to be underlined that as already discussed in previous reports, Schengen States confirmed that 1) there is no operational way to harmonise the visa fee (as well as service fee) expressed in local currency (Schengen States follow different systems and procedures of setting their exchange rates, in most cases imposed by their capitals); 2) granting of a grace period linked with the related travel medical insurance coverage proved impracticable; 3) agreeing on common criteria for (optional) visa fee exemptions related to certain categories of applicants remained an open issue; and finally 4) using the translation of the application form into Hindi and other official languages remains disadvantageous due to high number of official languages and widespread use of English.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The common list of supporting documents has been approved and is now a legally binding document for all the Schengen States in India (C(2015) 6940 final). All Schengen States implemented the common list already on 2 November 2015, the same day as VIS was rolled out in India. At this stage, there is no need to amend the list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As explained in the point 3.1 LSC in India achieved a high level of harmonisation. The following efforts, which go beyond the requirements of the Visa Code, were nevertheless undertaken, for example concerning visa payments by credit card with discussion on common level of charges.

As far as multiple-entry visas (MEVs) are concerned, the discussion on harmonisation continues. A list of all Schengen States' practices was compiled and analysed, however, the discussion on agreement for actual harmonisation is planned for 2017. The main observations from the analysis are:

- The approach varies between Schengen States, but in general most missions issue MEVs even for first time travellers, yet the validity differs.
- Definition of MEV also differs between States, in particular with regards to MEVs with shorter validity

- MEVs issued for business travellers tend to be with longer validity, while for tourists shorter (sometimes even 30 days or shorter)
- Smaller countries, which are frequently part of multi-country trips, tend to be more favourable towards MEVs
- Approach towards length of validity of MEV varies – many only issue visas as requested by the applicant and reflecting the proposed period of stay (usually also matched by the corresponding TMI) while others issue visas with validity for fixed periods exceeding the actual request or indicated length of stay.

3.4 Exchange of information

Visa statistics

Timely exchange of monthly visa statistics was quite regular for most of the Schengen States. However, as not all States were able to provide the statistics on monthly basis, the LSC Plenary in India agreed to exchange the data quarterly, which would hopefully stimulate more widespread circulation. The need for analysis and timely conclusions out of statistics exchange remains a challenge.

In addition to exchange of statistics collected locally, the LSC Plenary also discussed the results and trends on the basis of data collected centrally by DG HOME annually.

Cases of fraud

Given the growing number of applications, the general perception of frequency of frauds has increased. Over the last few years, a system of cooperation and information exchange concerning cases of fraud has been established between Schengen States in New Delhi, thus allowing quick reaction on such issues as visa annulments, migration alerts, document forgery and falsification and other visa related issues. Special mailing list devoted to "visa alerts" exchanges is the first point of information exchange often followed by dedicated meetings between States concerned.

Schengen States benefiting from local presence of national Document and Visa Adviser/Airport Liaison Officers/Police-immigration officers (DE (4), AT (1), FI and CH), were particularly active in this field and regularly provided guidance and expertise to all other Schengen States. DE Officers are present in Delhi (2), Mumbai, and Bangalore / Chennai (joint coverage). Other 3 ALOs are present in Delhi.

It was universally recognised by the Schengen States that there is a great need for increased help and presence of Document Advisors / ALOs, especially in underserved areas, notably Mumbai.

Many Schengen States also actively participate in local experience-sharing meetings of like-minded countries called Risk Assessment and Anti-Fraud Team (RAAFT), which includes also representatives from US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK, Ireland etc.

Legal Migration (students, family reunification)

LSC Plenaries also discussed the EU's legal migration policy framework and its relevance in India. Normally legal migration is covered by Local Migration Group and largely concerns national visas, however Schengen States appreciated more information exchange particularly with regards to application of the Free movement Directive 2004/38/EC, as well as practice for students' visas.

It is the general view of most Schengen States, that quality of these applications is poor, in particular for applicants coming from the neighbouring countries (BD and NP). This puts additional strain on resources of the visa sections.

Smuggling / trafficking cases

The issue continues to pose problems with many consulates identifying recurring cases. Effective addressing of these often complex cases encounters widespread challenges given lack of dedicated resources, frequent elaborate frauds and difficult cooperation with the local authorities.

Travel agents / commercial intermediaries

Even though exact statistics do not exist, it is a general view of Schengen States, that majority of visa applications in India are lodged with the help of a travel agent or a commercial intermediary. Travel agents guide the applicants through the lodging process, provide visa advice and tips, but unfortunately also in rare cases collude to hide the unlawful applications. The LSC Plenary discussed the possibility of re-defining its relationship with travel agents on several occasions, yet unsuccessfully. The travel agents fraternity lacks official representation and is highly disorganised and uncoordinated. Previous efforts by individual or groups of Schengen States to officialise the cooperation were eventually dropped as too time consuming and ineffective. Schengen States nevertheless continue to regularly exchange information about dishonest and fraudulent travel agents.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Throughout the reporting period, driven by the pressing concerns and eagerness to improve functioning of visa processes, the LSC in India continued to cover issues that go beyond what is strictly prescribed by the Visa Code. Most of these initiatives were developed through the dedicated Sub-groups and were a continuation of efforts started in previous years.

Family law

Dedicated workshop about complex Indian family law were organised thanks to in-house legal expertise of a Schengen mission. Such exchanges with experts continue to be highly valuable to all missions.

Cahier de doléances

The group's remit is to collect and compare the most common hindrances encountered by Schengen States' nationals when applying for visas to India. The work is done in cooperation with the local consular group (LCC). The data were collected and analysed and fed into bilateral EU-India discussions.

Joint ESP monitoring missions

Many Schengen States are obliged to perform regular audits of its ESPs. Even though the compulsory procedures, intensity and regularity varies between States, the overwhelming majority of the concerned States recognised the benefit of the group's objective. Schengen States performing the evaluations are advised to use the common checklist for ESPs' monitoring. Several such visits have already taken place with the results shared and discussed by the LSC Plenary.

AGORA platform

During the reporting period, the LSC Plenary has agreed to set up an AGORA platform for easy sharing and exchange of information both for LCC as well as LSC. The platform will be launched once all data are uploaded.

RSCO activities

RSCO actively participates in LSC Plenaries, both in Delhi and other locations. In addition to his contribution to these meetings, he undertook several other activities:

- *Fostering further cooperation within the network of all (current and prospective) MS and bigger non Schengen countries.*
- *Compiling monthly reports to exchange trends, statistics and other information.*
- *Organizing an expat visa officers exchange day in Delhi to enhance cooperation.*

4. Challenges

Response to 2014-2015 challenges

The main systemic challenges for the LSC India identified in 2015-2016 were linked to frequent frauds and people's smuggling and trafficking. Even though both issues were being addressed throughout the year, they remain to be a challenge.

Challenges for 2016-2017

The challenges faced in previous years linked to prevalence of frauds, cases of smuggling will continue. The LSC Plenary identified additional general challenge for the coming years:

- Visa sections' stretched resources – the growing Indian economy, increasing middle class, more direct flight connections all offer great potential for more visitors to the Schengen Area. There was already a 40% increase in the number of applications between 2014 and 2016.

The growing number of applications does not however always correspond to the reinforcements of local visa sections, both in staff and infrastructure. Assuming that the growing trend will continue, the effective remedies need to be identified. A more in-depth analysis of the situation is being prepared by the LSC Plenary.

5. Other issues

EU-India High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility

As the follow-up to the adoption of the EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMM) at the 13th EU-India Summit on 30 March 2016, the EU hosted in Brussels on 4 April, 2017, the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Mobility (HLDMM). It covered many visa-related issues experienced in the bilateral relations, including aspects linked to legal migration as well as irregular migration and smuggling / trafficking of human beings.

This report was prepared by the EUD in New Delhi and approved by the LSC New Delhi Plenary on 24 May 2016.



Jakarta, June 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) Jakarta (Indonesia) 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In Jakarta, Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings are held back to back with the EU Consular Counsellors meetings. The participants in LSC are thus Schengen MS Embassies (including Switzerland and Norway), with the participation open to the 5 non-Schengen EUMS Embassies participating in the Consular meetings, which allows to compare notes on visa issues and to address also the visa and immigration policies of the host country (Indonesia)².

Under a global reciprocal arrangement, one Member State issues Schengen visas on behalf of another Member State which is also represented locally. A growing number of Schengen Consulates use external service providers for collecting applications whilst a Member State, major Schengen visa provider, moved the visa processing to its new regional hub in Kuala Lumpur during the reporting period.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

There were 5 LSC meetings held during the reporting period (22/02/17, 23/11/2016, 22/06/16; 14/09/16, 27/04/16) chaired by the Delegation, back to back with the Consular meeting usually chaired by the Member State holding the Council Presidency (NL and SK in 2016; EUDEL in 2017 in absence of the relevant MS). The Secretariat is also ensured by the Delegation.

The meetings were well attended with active participation of MS Colleagues, most of them at Consul or Deputy Consul level/Heads of visa sections for the larger Embassies. The minutes of meetings were prepared by the Delegation and shared with the group and HQ (DG Home, EEAS). MS Embassies shared the reports with their capitals.

Most visa operations being centred in Jakarta, there was no Schengen coordination issues outside Jakarta raised in the LSC meetings during the reporting period. One MS is collecting visa requests through Honorary Consuls outside Jakarta. Two MS are considering decentralising visa request collections to main cities such as Surabaya, Medan or Denpasar/Bali.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² There are 21 EU Member States Embassies in Jakarta, all regularly attending the EU Consular/LSC meetings. Those include all EU Schengen Member States except Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta and Slovenia.

Member States and the EU Delegation worked well together on fulfilling the visa code requirements.

*A specific coordination was established in 2016 on **travel insurances requirements**, whereby the EU Delegation receives the requests of insurance companies, checks the compliance with the visa code requirements and update through written procedure with the MS the list of insurance companies made available in the Schengen Consulates.*

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

A harmonised list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in Indonesia was agreed by the Visa Committee in August 2011. This list is still applied by Member States in Indonesia with slight variations due to national instructions received by Consulates. There is no perceived need of further harmonization as the observed variations are not likely to generate 'visa shopping' behaviours.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

*During the reporting period, a **dialogue has been initiated on the regular adjustment of exchange rates for Schengen visas** to be used for Schengen visas fees, in order to ensure the approximation of these fees in Indonesian Rupiah across Schengen Consulates. The regular adjustments done by the German Consulate based on BCE exchange rates have been circulated in the LSC group for possible voluntary alignment. Most MS indicated that their capacity to coordinate locally in the LSC the timing and level of exchange rate adjustments is limited by the instructions they receive from their home administration. The currently uncoordinated adjustments did not result in major discrepancies in Indonesian Rupiah, similar fees being applied as per article 16.7 of the visa code.*

Multi Entry Visas (MEVs), as a general practice, are never granted for a first travel to the Schengen area. Beyond this starting point, Schengen Consulates don't see much need to harmonize practices as decisions are taken on a case by case basis based on the merits of each case. The LSC is engaging into the collection of data, but it seems that the vast majority of MEVs issued have been for a validity of one-year.

3.4 Exchange of information

*Good cooperation was ensured on the monthly transmission of **visa statistics** by MS and compilation by the EU Delegation, for discussion and in LSC meetings.*

2016 statistics showed an increase of almost 20% of Schengen visas issued compared to 2015. The considerable increase by one Member State (+57%) was the result of its new 48 hours delivery policy, and was accompanied by smaller increases in many other Schengen countries, reflecting the growth of Indonesian travelers to Europe. Non-Schengen EU partners confirmed this overall trend as regards the increase in issuance of their national visas.

The number of refused/rejected Schengen visas remained low and stable (1.05% in 2016 vs 0.97% in 2015), with variations between member States, a much increased rate in one MS (being compensated by a decrease in a number of other MS). It was noted that the increase

was the result of moving the process to a regional office in Kuala Lumpur, which had to align with standards applied to more challenging countries also handled there.

The LSC group was sensitized to - and discussed – current trends in illegal immigration to Europe and forged documents, using some South East Asian airports as transit, based on a presentation by a DE Police Document and Visa Advisor based in Kuala Lumpur.

Exchange of information was also managed on bilateral agreements on visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports, which Indonesia is actively seeking with third countries and has already concluded with a majority of EU Member States (16 bilateral agreements concluded; 9 under negotiation or project).

Beyond regular testing, the VISMail has been used marginally between some local Schengen Consulates.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Creation of a whatsapp group on consular and visa issues, where urgent questions can be exchanged/coordinated in between LSC/Consular meetings.

4. Challenges

As mentioned in last year's report, reduced staff capacity to carry out LSC effectively remains a concerning issue, with the need to develop the EU Delegation's capacity and expertise in Schengen and Consular affairs. One Schengen Member States Embassy has offered to train in its visa team the Delegation Official in charge of LSC. Headquarters could consider periodically holding LMSC training for EU Officials in delegation back to back with the regular EEAS Consular protection trainings.

5. Other issues

The LSC/Consular meetings were also the occasion to:

- *discuss with the Indonesian Directorate-General for Immigration and other Indonesian interlocutors **the scope and effects of the new visa waiver program in Indonesia**. Indonesia has extended in 2015-2016 its visa waiver to 169 countries including all EU and Schengen countries. Waiver of visa is provided to foreigners who wish to stay in Indonesia for 30 calendar days without extension, contrary to the visa on arrival that can be extended after 30 days. However, some confusion remains and the LSC meetings highlighted the necessity to strengthen the information given to the Indonesian authorities as well as to the Member States to help them advise their citizens and avoid them to pay over-stay fines. The LSC/Consular meetings during the reporting period offered also the occasion to engage with Indonesian authorities on the difficulty for EU businessmen/workers to have access to **work and residence permits**.*
- *hear Indonesia's expectation to be part of the list of countries that benefit from **visa exemption for short stays in the Schengen area**. Indonesia has been actively lobbying the EU for reciprocity with the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs addressing the matter in separate meetings with EU and Member States high level interlocutors. It was noted that the very low rate of visa rejections and visa overstays plays in favour of the Indonesian request, though the timing was not ripe for the EU to consider*

introducing a new list of countries that can benefit from a visa waiver in the current context of asylum and refugee crisis, a position that the Indonesian government is aware of.

- *discuss **consular and security matters** securing good dialogue and sharing of experience, notably on consular protection issues, including the protection of unrepresented EU citizens. An **EU crisis management plan** has been collectively developed by the group, endorsed by EU HoMs on 18 May 2016 and updated in September 2016.*

Approved in the Local Schengen Coordination meeting of 22 June 2017



15/06/2017

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS DES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN CÔTE D'IVOIRE RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

Sept Etats membres de l'espace Schengen (ci-après Etats membres) sont représentés en Côte d'Ivoire: l'Allemagne, la Belgique, l'Espagne, la France, l'Italie, la Suisse et les Pays-Bas, ces derniers ne délivrant pas de visas en Côte d'Ivoire. La Délégation de l'Union européenne en Côte d'Ivoire assure la coordination des réunions LSC, qu'elle organise avec les Etats membres.

Par rapport à 2016, le nombre de demandes de visas vers l'espace Schengen est stable, à l'exception de la France qui a enregistré une hausse conséquente de la demande sur les sept premiers mois de l'année. Plusieurs Etats membres (l'Espagne, l'Italie et la France depuis le 2 mars) ont recours à l'externalisation pour l'introduction des demandes des visas. Depuis que la France a recours à l'externalisation, l'Espagne et la Suisse ont enregistré une baisse des demandes de visas. La Belgique, quant à elle, en reçoit plus.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2016-2017

Deux réunions ont été organisées à la DUE le 7 décembre 2016 et le 30 mars 2017, à chaque fois en présence de M. René Meijers, Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer, établi à Accra.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les Etats membres représentés en Côte d'Ivoire appliquent uniformément les règles du Code des Visas. Leurs services échangent des informations relatives aux refus de visas, afin de réduire le "visa shopping", ce qui figure parmi les buts poursuivis par la mise en place du VIS.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Afin d'aller plus loin dans l'harmonisation, qui est tout de même satisfaisante, la Belgique coordonnera les travaux pour établir une liste commune des compagnies d'assurance. La France recensera quant à elle les banques qui permettent d'avoir accès aux informations des demandeurs de visas.

¹ Avril 2016 – Mars 2017

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Bien qu'il existe une harmonisation des procédures liée à l'application du Code visas Schengen, des spécificités nationales subsistent. Malgré tout, les Etats membres échangent entre eux des bonnes pratiques.

Plus de 80% des visas à entrées multiples octroyés par l'Espagne ont une validité de 90 jours sur une période de 6 mois. La Belgique accorde le maximum lorsque le dossier est bon. La France accorde des visas d'un an aux conjoints de français. En général, la durée des visas octroyés dépend du demandeur et de la fréquence de ses demandes.

3.4 Echange d'informations

- Statistiques: Jusqu'à présent échangées par courriel, les statistiques de l'ensemble des Etats membres seront collectées par la Suisse une fois par trimestre.
- Fraude: La France conduira les travaux sur la question de la lutte contre la fraude. A ce titre, elle prévoit d'organiser une formation sur les bonnes pratiques de détection de la fraude. Il a également été convenu que des alertes pourraient être échangées entre les Etats membres, afin de permettre une meilleure identification des documents frauduleux.
- Assurances de voyage: Comme mentionné précédemment, la Belgique établira une liste des compagnies d'assurances les plus courantes.

4. Défis

Les défis restent globalement les mêmes que ceux relevés dans le précédent rapport. La fraude documentaire demeure un problème important, le visa shopping n'est pas totalement éliminé. La fraude est à l'origine d'un taux élevé de refus de visas, sans pour autant en être l'unique explication. Le risque migratoire des demandeurs de visas en est la principale cause. Par ailleurs, bien que les Etats membres demandent des garanties, ils n'ont dans les faits aucun moyen de poursuivre les garants des demandeurs qui ne regagnent pas la Côte d'Ivoire à l'expiration de leur visa.

Egalement, depuis qu'elle a recours à l'externalisation, la France fait face à une hausse des demandes de visas (à l'été 2016, elle a enregistré une hausse de 25% par rapport à la même période l'année précédente). Les locaux de son partenaire VFS s'avèrent aussi trop exigu pendant les périodes de forte affluence, au cours desquelles environ 350 visiteurs s'y rendent chaque jour.

5. Divers

La mise en œuvre du projet RSCO (Regional Schengen Cooperation Officers), financé par l'Union européenne, a débuté en Côte d'Ivoire. M. René Meijers, RSCO pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest, a assisté aux deux dernières réunions de coordination locale Schengen. Il a fait circuler une enquête auprès des Etats membres et a émis plusieurs suggestions pour améliorer la coordination locale, notamment pour ce qui est de la mutualisation des efforts pour l'échange d'informations, ce qui a commencé à être fait.



Amman, 15 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

14 Schengen Member States have consulates in Amman and issue visas (AT, BE, CZ, FR, DE, EL, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, ES, SE, CH). There are several non-represented countries (EE, DK, FI, IS, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, PT, SI, SK) that are represented by another Schengen country as follows: AT represents SI and SK; BE represents LU; CH represents LI; DE represents LT and LV, ES represents PT; IT represents MT; NL represents EE; NO represents DK, FI and IS. Those countries which are not represented in Amman have their nearest consulates in Cairo (MT, LV, LT, PT, SI), Ankara (EE, FI), Beirut (SK, DK) and London (IS).

As a consequence of the Syrian crisis and the withdrawal of many diplomatic missions from Damascus, many Schengen countries' embassies in Amman are authorised to receive applications from Syrian nationals. Some countries have no restrictions on where Syrians should apply (FR), whereas others have authorised Beirut and Amman to receive the applications (PL, NL, AT, IT, CH, BE, HU, CZ, EL), with the majority being processed in Beirut. DE receives visa applications from Syrians in Ankara, Beirut and Amman. ES does not receive visa applications in Amman from Syrians who are not ordinary residents in Jordan; all Syrian citizens can apply at the ES embassy in Beirut. FR issues as well Asylum's visa for only Iraqis and Syrians residents in Jordan.

There are several MS that are not represented in Iraq or not issuing Schengen visas at their Embassy there, and in some cases they issue visas for Iraqi nationals at their embassies in Amman.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Four LSC meetings were held in the reporting period (in May 2016, September 2016, November 2016 and February 2017). The meetings were generally well attended with regular participation by most of the MS which have embassies in Amman. Throughout the reporting period, EUDEL chaired the LSC meetings and drew up summary reports. The reports are shared with MS, some of which also share the reports with capitals.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The price of visa fees was discussed since MS appeared to be charging rather different fees for a short-term Schengen visa. All MS took the prescribed rate of 60 € as the starting point,

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

and the notable differences stemmed from diverse national practices for adjusting to exchange rate fluctuations. Due to that it seems an agreement on this is quite tough to obtain.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Commission Implementing Decision on the list of supporting documents entered into force on 26 March 2013 and is applicable to all Schengen MS. As has been the case in previous reporting periods, MS still receive a proportion of incomplete applications but no MS have expressed a need to amend the list of supporting documents.

3.3 Exchange of information

In the forum of LSC, MS continued to routinely exchange information on visa statistics, fraud cases and experiences regarding the documentation requirements for visa applications.

Compared to the previous year, 2016 visa applications increased by an average of + 17%. Sweden and Czech Republic (42%) saw the highest increase, while Italy, Austria and France were the only three MS which saw a decrease in the number of visa applications. Across all MS, the average approval rate was 83 % (quite similar than last year). Sweden has the highest refusal rate at 44 %, followed by Poland (21%) and Czech Republic has the lowest at 3 %. The main reasons for refusal were lack of proper supporting papers and doubts regarding the purpose of the stay.

Visas issued for Iraqi nationals represented 12 % of the total visas approved in 2016, making up 26% of all visas issued by Austria and Belgium, in contrast with 0,1 % of total visas approved by Greece and 1% for Spain. Concerning Syrian nationals, 7,3 % of all visas issued in Jordan were for them, and they made up 29% for Germany, whereas they only constituted 2% for Greece and Poland and 3% for Hungary.

Furthermore, several exchanges between MS highlighted some travel and translation companies are suspected to make suspicious practices and fake documentations.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In the framework of the EU-Jordan mobility partnership a project implemented by ICMPD has been launched on counter-trafficking and outreach to Jordanian expatriates. Moreover, negotiations about VFA/RA agreement has begun, but it seems than Jordanians are not keen on discussing on Readmission Agreement and we are still expecting comments on their side for 6 months.

An EMLO has been deployed in Eudel and appointed as its representative in LSC meetings. About Asylum policy, only France issue Asylum visas, FR issued 640 visas in 2016.

An issue was raised from HQ, mentioning several Jordanian students, under the aegis of Erasmus+ programme, who tried to get a D Visa for studying in Latvia, Portugal or Lithuania, are obliged to go to e.g. Cairo to apply at regular embassies which are not present in Amman. This is an issue because many cannot afford the travel and accommodation costs required to apply for student visa with MS not represented in Jordan. Some MS informed that this had previously been solved, on a case-by-case basis, by issuing a 3-month Schengen visa and then obtaining the longer term stay permit when in the country.

4. Challenges

If MS continue to face challenges in terms of applicants' compliance with deadlines for lodging visa applications as well as providing the required documentation, the Common Information Sheet agreed last year has helped to reduce the refusal rate and the amount of incomplete applications. MS face as well long waiting lists for appointments, even if some of them have introduced a phone number which require manpower.

5. Other issues

No further issues to report. This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation.



June 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in *NAIROBI* 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

There are currently seventeen (18) Schengen Member States consulates issuing Schengen Visas in Nairobi.

These are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

The EU Delegation assumes with the rotating Presidency (Slovakia for the second semester 2016 when not present and Malta for the second semester – non represented in Nairobi) the role of convening and chairing plenary LSC meetings on a monthly basis.

Some of the representations (Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Italy and United Kingdom) use the services of Visa Facility Service (VFS). However, Belgium and Spain started outsourcing services from TLS and BLS respectively effective 15 December 2016.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

The LSC meetings take place every month, usually at the EUD Offices, together with the Consular Affairs meetings. They are usually well attended. Every year, around April-May, a LSC meeting is organised in Mombasa together with the Consular Affairs meeting. It is an opportunity to meet the Honorary Consuls from the MS.

The meetings are usually chaired by the EUD. Minutes are systematically drafted by EUD and shared with the MS. Sometimes, at the request from MS or on the initiative from EUD, the monthly meeting includes a presentation from a third-party like a lawyer office regarding legal documents or a bank regarding the presentation of new mode of payment. Also, the NL ILO organises a meeting about visa, passport and other forgeries.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The MS and EUD are well prepared and the Visa Code is applied correctly. MS systematically exchange information about visa statistics, especially refusals. They also exchange information about fake documents and visa shopping.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

A list of agreed Local Insurance Companies is systematically maintained every month and published when updated on the EUD website and the MS websites. Recently, DK detected a case of a fake Insurance Certificate. The MS decided to suspend temporarily the concerned company from the list for further investigation, and to implement mitigation measures.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonised list of supporting documents has been approved in September 2014. It has been published on the EUD and MS websites. It seems well applied and no complaint for MS has been registered.

EUD proposed at the last meeting a revision of the supporting documents to make sure of their validity.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

For the moment, there is no specific discussion about harmonisation of practices. This could be envisaged for the year to come.

3.4 Exchange of information

The MS exchange systematically information about visa statistics, cases of fraud, travel medical insurance as it is already described above. They usually exchange very freely concerns, ideas and issues as it arises in their daily work.

For the year to come, EUD will organise specific activities to intensify the exchange of information like presentation of VFS, TLS, meetings with airlines companies and airport management companies, etc...

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No specific initiative has been taken.

4. Challenges

1. No specific challenge to mention.
2. The main challenges to address in the year to come are the issue with the travel medical insurance and the revision of the harmonised list of supporting documents.

5. Other issues

No specific issue to mention.



EUROPEAN UNION

**EUROPEAN UNION OFFICE IN KOSOVO
EUROPEAN UNION SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE**

Pristina, 10 May 2017

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KOSOVO
2016-2017 REPORT¹**

1. Introduction

This report takes stock of major developments in the framework of the Local Schengen Cooperation among Member States present in Kosovo and covers the reporting period from April 2016 until March 2017. Kosovo hosts 18 EU Member States. Schengen visas in Kosovo are issued by Switzerland², Norway³, Italy⁴, Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, Germany, Finland and Slovenia⁵. Sweden and the Czech Republic issue and receive Kosovo citizens' application for visas in Skopje, capital of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Poland issues Schengen visas for Kosovo citizens in Skopje and Tirana.

In the reporting period, there was a rise in Schengen visa applications across EU Member States in Kosovo. We can expect this trend to continue as long as there is no progress on visa liberalisation, which presents important challenges to EU Member States, as regards long waiting lists and waiting periods. Instances of visa shopping are also reported. As a result, some consulates experience daily overload, and some report absence of applicants in the scheduled appointments.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

From April to March 2017, two LSC meetings took place (with a third meeting taking place on 6 April). The meetings were convened by the European Union / EUSR Office in Kosovo and chaired by the Head of Political, Economic and European Integration Section with the assistance of the LSC contact person. LSC meetings under reporting period were well attended, but the representation is still quite heterogeneous, varying from the heads of visa sections, to at times attendance by the Ambassadors. As a consequence, sometimes the focus of the discussion can shift from technical, operational issues concerning the application of the Visa Code to rather political matters. In the absence of visa liberalisation for Kosovo, the LSC meetings also served as platforms to provide an update to the EU Member States on the

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Switzerland issues Schengen visa on behalf of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg since November 2015, before this date Switzerland already processed visa applications for France, Austria and Liechtenstein.

³ Norway deals with visa applications on behalf of Denmark, Lithuania (since June 2015) and Iceland (since November 2015).

⁴ Italy processes also applications from Estonia

⁵ Slovenia issues short-stay visas for Latvia

progress of visa liberalisation with Kosovo and fulfilment of the two remaining requirements. The EU/EUSR Office has systematically prepared minutes and shared them with Member States, including any comments or amendments in the final version. There is no need to organise LSC meetings outside of the capital, given Kosovo's limited size.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The LSC meetings offer an adequate forum to Member States to exchange relevant information on the application of the Visa Code as set out in Title V, art.48 of regulation No 810/2009.

Several challenges were raised and discussed during the LSC meetings. Given the rise in Schengen visa applications, one of the reported challenges relates to the timing of appointments which does not always comply with art. 9 of the Visa Code (two weeks' time from the date of request). Depending on the destination country, the waiting time to get an appointment in order to lodge the visa application can be measured in weeks but also in months. As a consequence, during the LSC meetings some Member States have reported cases of "visa shopping", sometimes also due to the applicant's difficulty to schedule an appointment. According to Member States, some applicants who were already rejected from one Embassy go to another one. It was at times difficult to determine the reason and final destination of the travel. Member States reported a relatively high abuse of Schengen visas, where applicants did not go to the country which issued the visa but most travelled to Germany or Switzerland on another EU Member State visa, with sometimes only one day stopover in the country that initially issued the visa.

There are also challenges with an abuse of the visa appointment booking system, possibly by travel agencies, who then sell the places to the applicants. The subject of outsourcing (through VFS Global) of visa applications was discussed but not recommended by some Member States in the Kosovo context with many first time applicants, because of very similar or same names, with high rejection rates and difficulty to verify the authenticity of documents.

Several Member States raised the problem of frequent use of fake supporting documents for the visa application such as bank statements, TATIM and Trusty documents or fake transaction for the visa fee. There were also frequent cases of fake marriages reported by several Member States.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonisation of the list of supporting documents has been completed in Kosovo in 2012. As there was a request from some EU MS in the LSC meeting, the EU/EUSR Office re-circulated the Schengen Harmonised list of documents prior to the LSC meeting in December and from the discussion and responses in the two LSC meetings, the harmonised list of documents is being used.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In the absence of a Visa Facilitation agreement between Kosovo and the EU, the EU Member States continue to apply different application fees. Some EU Member States use the €35 visa fee for Kosovo passports from the EU-Serbia Visa Facilitation Agreement or on the basis of a political decision taken by their capitals, while most have the €60 visa fee. There could be an opportunity to harmonise the visa fee downward to €35, as none of the participants contested this in the meetings, with some MS suggesting that they need to check this with their capitals. This issue could be brought up at Brussels level.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States continued to submit visa-related statistics although not all did so regularly. The EU/EUSR Office reminded the EU Member States to send monthly statistics at the beginning of every month to the specific functional mailbox and committed to consolidate the responses and disseminate these statistics at the end of each month or at least on a quarterly basis. There is certainly a scope to improve the information exchange in this regard both on the timely reception and the dissemination part.

The EU/EUSR Office functional mailbox and the common mailing list proved useful tools for Member States and were used to report cases of fraud or forged documents.

In the exchanges, the issue of stamping of refused visa applications was raised a few times but subsequently contested by others as not in compliance with the Visa Code. It was suggested to consult the VIS system instead on refused applicants.

There was also an exchange of experiences on the application of Article 24 of the Visa Code related to the 15-day grace period and whether this article is strictly applied. The use of the 15-day grace period was not uniform but in general a few extra days were granted within the period of the 15 extra days or together with one entry visa.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

NTR

4. Challenges

Given the delay in the visa liberalisation process, mainly due to political stalemate over the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro, and the subsequent rise in Schengen visa applications, the challenge of long waiting periods and challenges with the appointment system might continue for some time to come. Some Member States might turn to outsourcing of the visa application process to address this issue and share such experience with others.

The LSC meetings continue to contribute to exchange of experience and best practices and examples to fight other phenomena and challenges in the Kosovo context such as fake and forged visa supporting documents and this will remain a priority for the next reporting period.

In order to deal with the abuse of the Schengen visa it was suggested by the destination countries to set up more thorough controls at first Schengen entry/exit points. It was also proposed that once there is a clear indication that previous visa was abused to reject any other new application from such applicants.

Beirut, 9 June 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in LEBANON 2016-2017 REPORT ¹

1. Introduction

Of the 26 Schengen Member States (MS), 15 are issuing Schengen visas in Beirut and 11 are represented by other MS. The visa issuing MS are Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Norway, Slovakia (since August 2016) and Switzerland. The countries represented by another Schengen MS are: Estonia (represented by France), Latvia (represented by Hungary), Lichtenstein (represented by Switzerland), Lithuania (represented by Austria), Luxembourg (represented by Belgium), Malta (represented by Italy), Portugal (represented by Spain), Slovenia (represented by Hungary), Finland (represented by Austria) and Iceland (represented by Norway). Sweden does not have any consular section in Beirut but uses an external service provider for the collection of applications.

There are no LSC consular sections in Lebanon outside Beirut.

10 MS use external service providers for the collection of applications. Denmark, Italy, France and Switzerland use the provider [TLS Contact](#) whereas Austria, Greece, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden use [VFS Global](#). During 2016 Spain started to use the provider BLS International.

Cyprus, which is a candidate country for Schengen, is also using VFS Global.

Due to the crisis in neighbouring Syria, Lebanon has received a large number of refugees, with over 1 million refugees currently registered². Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, both the number of issued visas and the refusal rates have increased substantially in Beirut. The number of issued visas is almost 80% higher than in 2011, and the refusal rate is 75% higher. These increases are surely related to the Syrian crisis but the lack of locally available statistical information on the nationality of the applicants has prevented a verifiable explanation to the increased number of applicants and of refusal rates.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

LSC meetings have been held with a regular interval at the premises of the EU Delegation. Five regular LSC meetings took place during the reporting period (6 April 2016, 8 June 2016, 5 October 2016, 14 December 2016 and 10 February 2017). The first two meetings were co-chaired by EU DEL with NL, the third and the fourth meeting were co-chaired by EUDEL with SK, the last meeting was co-chaired with IT, in representation of Malta. MS co-chairing the meetings were in charge of the drafting of the agenda as well as the meeting reports.

In addition to the regular LSC meetings, two workshops on fraudulent visas and official documents were organised by DE on 14 and 19 April 2016.

The meetings were well-attended with an average of 75% attendance of the 14 embassies issuing Schengen visas in Beirut. The meetings focused on current topics such as attempted fraud and travel restrictions, the need to harmonise visa practices to prevent visa shopping and diverging treatments of visa applicants. The meetings also provided an opportunity to share information to further the coordination on a number of relevant and related topics.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Statistics collected both centrally and locally in 2016 indicated substantial differences among the MS in Beirut on:

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>

- Refusal rates: ranging from 3,7% to 23,2 %;
- Average waiting time to get a visa: ranging from 10 to 14 calendar days;
- Workload: the number of visa applications handled per full time visa section staff member ranges from 845 to 6436 (included visa sections that have outsourced the visa handling to external service providers).

These differences may in turn indicate differences in visa practices – and a risk for visa-shopping. However, compared to previous years, differences are lower, in particular for the waiting time to get an appointment. Now that almost all MS have external providers, it could be concluded that the risk of visa shopping is reduced.

In order to identify possible differences in visa practices and, where needed, propose further harmonisation, LSC working groups composed of 2 or more MS were in 2013 established based on the Visa Code Art 48:

- Art 48.1a – Harmonised list of supporting documents
- Art 48.1b – Criteria for exemptions from paying the visa fee
- Art 48.2 – Common Information Sheet
- Art 48.3a – Exchange of information on Monthly Statistics
- Art 48.3b – Exchange of information on Fraud and Migration Risks
- Art 48.3c – Exchange of information on Transport and Insurance Companies

During the reporting period these working groups have been reporting back to the LSC-meetings on their progress.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

During the reporting period, the working group on harmonised list of supporting documents has compiled a document outlining a common list but due to large differences between MS regarding what documents to add to the list, a final version has been agreed with the only opposition of one MS.

3.3 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings provide an opportunity to exchange information on a number of topics relevant for the issuing of Schengen visas. A consistently reoccurring issue during the reporting period has been the prevalence of fraud documents. A focal point with the Lebanese security forces have been identified, in order to better handle the large amount of fraud documents that has been discovered by visa issuing MS. MS have also frequently been reporting and discussing attempts at frauds, for example the selling of fake appointments (to a visa issuing embassy) or a specific travel agency known for issuing producing counterfeit documents.

The list of official and recognised travel documents has been a standing point on the agenda of the LSC since October 2014. At each meeting, MS are asked to confirm the accuracy of the data in the list provided by DG HOME.

A LSC working group has been working to ensure that exchange of statistics is made in conformity with Visa Code Art 48.3a. Discussions have been held at the LSC meetings on how to best handle the problem of MS not being able to distinguish between Syrian and Lebanese applicants, and what data to collect in order to get the most accurate view on issues such as refusal rates, average waiting time etc.

Due to the increasingly vulnerable situation for refugees in Lebanon and the de-facto closing of the border for Syrian and Palestinian refugees discussions have been held regarding their travel routes through Lebanon and any affect that it might have had for the issuing of Schengen visas in Lebanon.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Fraud Workshop in April 2016

During the reporting period, the trend of increased number of fraud cases, as was seen also during the previous reporting period, seem to have continued. Two fraud workshops were

held on 14 and on 19 April 2016 by a representative from the Germany Ministry of Interior working at the DE Embassy in Beirut. The workshops gave a presentation of some document security features related to Syrian documents (passport, ID-card, driving license, civil extracts, etc.). More specifically, the following was discussed: general information concerning issuance of Syrian documents, security papers & safeguards, printing technologies, additional security features and safeguards in documents. The workshop also included live cases and information exchange. A Syrian reference guide, prepared by the US Homeland Security Investigations, was shared after the workshops, along with an Alert concerning counterfeit seal of the Syrian MoFA and Frontex Quick Check Card for Syrian passports.

4. Challenges

Two main challenges for the LSC in Lebanon remain the same as last year:

1) The discrepancy in refusal rates and average waiting time to get a Schengen visa

More information is needed in order to better understand and analyse the substantial differences in refusal rates. Regarding the average waiting time, it is due to the discrepancy of staff and workload among the MS.

2) The continuing crisis in Syria which causes a heavy workload for the MS

Due to the on-going crisis in Syria, MS have faced an increased workload. The estimated proportion of Schengen visa applications submitted by Syrian nationals to embassies in Beirut amounts to around 8% of all applications received. It is important to note that not all MS can present separate statistics on Syrian and Lebanese applicants.

Due to the great impact that the Syrian crisis has had on Lebanon, the repercussions for the visa handling for the MS in Beirut has been discussed in a number of LSC meetings. Challenges identified include the different criteria to accept or refuse Syrian applications, increased attempted frauds, the problems for Syrian nationals to acquire the required documents from Damascus and the difficulty of proving the authenticity of official documents.

The next reporting period will continue to focus on the work that will be performed in the working groups and to collectively implement the suggestions they present.

5. Other issues

After refusing in to issue a visa to a Syrian family of 4, Belgium faced the judgment before of the Court of the European Justice regarding the preliminary ruling of issuing a visa on humanitarian grounds because of international obligations. The Court ruled that European Union states are not bound to provide an entry visa to refugees facing serious danger.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MEXICO

Mexico City 05 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Mexico City (MEXICO) 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The Delegation of the European Union to Mexico is responsible for the organisation, chairing and following up on the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings. The following 21 Schengen Member States (and Schengen associated MS) are present in Mexico City:

1. **Austria** (also issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Malta)
2. **Belgium** (also representing Luxemburg and Slovenia in Schengen visas)
3. **Bulgaria** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
4. **Cyprus** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
5. **Czech Republic**
6. **Denmark** (also issuing Schengen visas for Sweden, Norway and Iceland)
7. **Finland**
8. **France**
9. **Germany**
10. **Greece**
11. **Hungary**
12. **Italy**
13. **Netherlands**
14. **Poland**
15. **Portugal**
16. **Romania** (not applying the common visa policy in full, always invited to LSC meetings)
17. **Slovakia**
18. **Spain** (also issuing Schengen visas for Estonia)
19. **Sweden** (Schengen visas for Sweden are issued by Denmark)
20. **Norway** (Schengen visas for Norway are issued by Denmark)
21. **Switzerland** (also issuing Schengen visas for Liechtenstein)

Outside the capital city, only Spain has professional consular representations (General Consulates) in Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) and Monterrey (State of Nuevo León).

2. LSC meetings held

In the reporting period three LSC meetings were held in Mexico City. Meetings were well attended. The LSC group met at the EU Delegation. LSC meetings are chaired by the EU DEL (with minutes and follow up dealt with by the chair). MSs do not draft their own minutes for their capitals.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the EU-Mexico tourist visa waiver agreement (VWA), Mexican nationals are exempted from Schengen visas. Therefore, there is reasonably low number of Schengen visa applications in Mexico (and by third country nationals only). Larger Member States issue approx. 140 Schengen visas per year, with the special case of ES issuing approx.300 Schengen visas each year (with a refusal rate of ca. 10%). Medium and smaller MSs do not issue more than 40 Schengen visas annually.

Schengen Consuls cooperate well via informal contacts (email, phone and whats app).

VIS was implemented in Mexico and is fully operational.

MSs apply different exchange rates and also update them with different regularity, mostly according to instructions from their capitals, thus it is impossible to have one uniform visa fee in the local currency. However, the differences in fees for Schengen visas are insignificant and they do not lead to visa shopping.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In 2016 EU DEL Mexico has launched the exercise to harmonise supporting documents requested at Schengen Consulates. Work is in progress. A draft list was distributed to Member States in the end of 2016 and is now open for their comments and inputs (deadline 15 May 2017).

3.3 Exchange of information

Some Schengen Consuls maintain regular working contacts between themselves (also due to their close cooperation in broader consular issues). EU DEL has been encouraging a regular exchange of Schengen-related information.

According to the latest exchange of information, most applicants for Schengen Visa in Mexico come from Belize, Cuba, Ecuador, Bolivia; however among applicants there have also been nationals of African and Asian countries (Nigeria, India, Russia, and China), as well as Ukraine.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

The treatment of EU nationals entering Mexico has improved since last year. Although there were cases of EU travellers denied entry (Mexican authorities at times did not even reveal motives for such refusals), in general it can be stated that MEX authorities comply with the VWA.

5. Other issues

In July 2016 EU Delegation to Mexico was informed by the Mexican Foreign Ministry of a unilateral change of Mexico's immigration policy. Mexico has opened its borders to non-EU tourists/businessmen/artists/students, who are permanently residing in the Schengen Zone or who have a valid visa from one of the Schengen States. Interestingly, the United Kingdom was included in the scope of this new policy, while the Republic of Ireland was not.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MONTENEGRO

Podgorica, 17 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO 2016-2017 REPORT

1. Introduction

In addition to the EU Delegation to Montenegro, there are now 19 member states (MS) with diplomatic representation in Podgorica (14 embassies: GR, AT, GB, CZ, FR, SI, IT, BG, HU, SK, PL, DE, RO, HR and 1 Consul Gerant (HR in Kotor's consulate) and 3 Honorary Consuls representing 5 countries (DK/SE, BE/LU and MT) in the country.

For the purpose of issuing Schengen visas C 15 member states (MS): AT, BE, DK, EE, ES, FR, LV, LT, LU, HU, NL, PL, PT, SK and SI agreed to turned the consular function of issuing the Schengen visas C to the Common Application Centre Podgorica – CAC which works in structure of the Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia.

During this period two Local Schengen Group meetings were held, following the Consular protection meetings. They were both well attended by the representatives of MS of the Schengen agreement and the representatives of the observers' countries (Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria). The EUD organized the meetings, drafted the minutes, compiled and circulated relevant information. Meetings were chaired by the EUD's Head of Administration.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

At the first meeting held on 21 April 2016, Participants shared visa issues and statistics for the first trimester of 2016:

During this period, the Common Application Centre issued 105 visas, Italian embassy issued 43 and German embassy issued 54 visas.

German embassy shared the information on the introduction of new Immigration Law in Germany which become effective as of January 1, 2016 and provides a broader access to nationals of several Balkan countries to the German labour market who may also receive national visas and combined residence and work permits for all forms of employment in Germany between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2020. It can also grant an access to the labour market without having accomplished university studies or a vocational training of at least two years but applicants must first apply for a national visa at an overseas German diplomatic mission and obtain a pre-approval from the Federal Employment Agency, so that the processing time of their applications is shortened from six weeks to a couple of days.

The Federal Employment Agency will not only consider the comparability requirement, but it will also assess whether "privileged" workforce (German nationals or EU nationals) is available or not. Additionally, internal approval must be denied if the individual was already in Germany in the last 24 months and obtained social benefits according to Germany's social welfare law for asylum seekers. Such a denial would not be required, exceptionally, if the individual filed an application for asylum in Germany between January 1, 2015 and October 23, 2015, but repatriated from Germany on October 24, 2015 or immediately after.

With the latter exception, the German government intends to reward individuals that had not pursued an unpromising asylum seeking process, but instead had returned to their home countries to pursue a regular visa application process for the purposes of working in Germany.

The participants were asked to send inputs for the LSC annual report and to initiate additional topics for future LSC meetings.

At the second meeting held on 5 December 2016, participants shared the statistics on issued/refused visas up to the end of November.

Participants were asked to review and send again the list of supporting documents (which was already harmonized in the past) to the EUD for compiling as it will be one of the subjects at the next LSC meeting.

The existing list from MS embassies to Serbia (Schengen countries) will be sent to participants for comparison.

Total number of issued/refused Schengen visas in 2016 was:

	Issued visas	Refused visas
The Common Application Centre	537	1
Italian embassy	208	4
Germany	258	10
Greece	90	

For the first trimester of 2017, CAC issued 100 visas and refused 1, Italy issued 65 and refused 2 visas.

3. State of play

MS application of the visa code is satisfactory

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

- The Visa code has been thoroughly discussed during the Local Schengen meetings.
- The EUD compiled the information on MS visa statistics for 2016 and first three months of 2017 and circulated to all LSC participants and DG HOME.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The general view of MS is that Annex II to the Schengen regulation (lists of supporting documents) and the instructions received from the capitals offer substantial and adequate information, more than enough for Montenegro but the lists received from the MS and compiled by the EUD will be checked again at the next LSC meeting in May 2017.

EUD will inform if further harmonization is required.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As on territory of Montenegro multi entry Schengen visas are issued by 4 Consular Departments: IT, DE, HE and CAC (issuing Schengen visas for 15 MS), it's very difficult to talk about formal attempts to harmonize visa-issuing practice. All mentioned MS issued visas

under regulation of Visa Code. Eventual problems are mostly discussed between consular workers at LSC meetings.

The legal base of length of validity of multiple entry visas (MEVs) issued at CAC is bind on validity of Montenegrin living permit. Montenegro issued temporary living permit for one year what influence on validity of multi entry Schengen visas issuing mostly with validity less than one year.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC includes annual statistics, cases of fraud, communication problems with local authorities, reasons for visa refusals, travel documents issued by the host state.

The CAC reports about all these subjects every month to the other MS.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Training

The training on the "Detection of falsified documents" was organized for the MS visa section staff by the FRONTEX and the EUD staff during the course of 3 days, from 5 to 9 December 2016, at the premises of the EU Delegation.

The aim of the training was to prevent irregular migration of travelers obtain visa by presenting forged or counterfeit documents.

The overall outcome of the training was very positive, trainers performed with high level of professionalism and cooperated for the success of the activity. Presentation of this training was shared with the participants.

4. Challenges

MS will continue to jointly resolve outstanding issues (period of registration of foreigners, online registration form for the registration of foreigners) with Montenegrin authorities.

5. Other issues

N/A



15 May 2016

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) MOZAMBIQUE 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) Group continued to meet and articulate Schengen relevant issues. Schengen visa issuing MS (**DE, ES, FR, IT, NL, PT, FI, NO**) delivered more than 13,5 thousand visas in Mozambique in the year 2016, also in representation of other Schengen MS. DK (which also used to represent EE, SE, IS, NO) stopped issuing visas during the reporting period (due to the Embassy closing down end-year 2017). Following closure of visa issuance the following changes in the local representation for visa issuance occurred: DK is now represented by NL; SE is now represented by FR; EE is represented by PT; NO started to issue visas; IS Schengen visa issuance is ensured by the DK consular representations in South Africa (Durban and Pretoria).

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

The LSC had two meetings in the reporting period, which were well attended. In between meetings, LSC coordination and exchange of information is ensured by e-mail exchanges.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU Delegation is chairing the LSC since June 2012, working closely with MS and with the full support and cooperation from the European Commission (DG Home).

The LSC fosters exchange of information, coordination and cooperation in carrying-out the tasks foreseen in the Visa Code, including harmonised application of the Visa Code provisions and implementation of the Visa Information System (VIS), in force since June 2013.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Mozambique LSC harmonised list of documents supporting a visa application was adopted by a Commission Implementing Decision of 4/9/2014, and in 15 September 2014 all MS started applying it, as joint agreed starting date. LSC has not deemed necessary further amendments.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017.

3.3 Exchange of information

Exchange of information is encouraged in the LSC, namely on: (i) visa statistics trends, based not only on the yearly official statistics as well as quarterly when possible; (ii) the trends regarding the few instances of migratory risk or visa fraud were discussed in the meetings; (iii) overview of the general VIS functioning; (iv) best practices and relevant experiences.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A.

4. Challenges

At times, timely reconfirmation of specific visa related information by the Mozambican authorities presents some challenges (cases in point are: official sharing of updated list and specimens of Mozambican travel documents where a visa sticker may be affixed; implementation details and start date of announced new legislation allowing for visa issuing in most Mozambique border posts). LSC will continue to strive for early notice and information, as well as reinforcing internal coordination which has been instrumental in overcoming the abovementioned challenges.

5. Other issues

No other issues to address.



May 15, 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NEPAL **2016-2017 REPORT¹**

1. Introduction

Six LSC Member States- Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Norway (NO) and Switzerland (CH) are currently present in Nepal.

On issuing Schengen visas, the following agreements are in place:

- Denmark represents Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden
- Finland represents Finland only
- Germany represents Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, the Netherlands (stopped issuing visas as of May 1, 2016), and Slovenia
- Switzerland represents Latvia, Liechtenstein, Poland, and Slovakia

Embassy of Denmark and also the Netherlands are using an external provider (VFS) for the collection of visa applications. FR is not issuing visas in Nepal, this has been transferred to New Delhi and the collection of visa applications is dealt with by an external provider (VFS).

Most of the Embassies not having agreements in place, issue visas for Nepali citizens in New Delhi.

DK Embassy will be closing down at the end of 2017. It will continue receiving visa applications until 31 August 2017 and issuing visas until 30 September 2017. Embassy of Sweden in New Delhi will take over issuance of visas for Sweden and Denmark from 1 August 2017. Norway has an Embassy in Nepal, but visas are currently issued by Denmark. Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi will take over from 1 September 2017.

2. LSC meetings held in 2015-2016

The EU Delegation is in charge of Local Schengen Cooperation, including organizing and chairing meetings. In the mentioned period the LSC working group (WG) met twice (on 22 February and 17 March). The meetings were very well-attended. The main topics covered in the meetings were: further harmonization of supporting documents for visa requests, exchange on visa statistics and introduction to the Regional Schengen Cooperation project. The LSC revised the list of supporting documents further to comments received from the Visa Committee of 18.11.2015. EUDEL draws up a report following the meetings and shares it with LSC group who further share it with their capitals.

LSC agreed to have meetings on regular basis, on average every 3 to 4 months.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

LSC MS in Nepal are well-prepared to conduct their tasks as foreseen in the Visa Code. The LSC meeting were aiming at reviewing the comments received from the Visa Committee and further harmonising the lists of supporting documents. Therefore, Art. 48 (1) a) of the Visa Code can by and large be considered as implemented. Art. 48 (4) is also applied: LSC meetings are held regularly. Reports of the meetings have started to be circulated since December 2015 according to Art. 48(5).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

LSC MS have worked on this priority since 2014. The draft produced by the group was considered by the Visa Committee on 18 November 2015 and replies to the comments received have been submitted following the meeting in 22 February 2017.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The systems in use allow for collection of statistics and sharing by all MS.

LSC members are regularly in contact through an e-mail distribution list and exchange views and concerns when necessary, either bilaterally or as a whole group. Exchange of information is even more active and intense at the level of officers receiving the visa applications. The main topics concern fraudulent visa applications, forged documents and original documents with false contents.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings are a good opportunity to exchange information on a number of issues relevant for issuing Schengen visas, namely statistics, cases of fraud and refusals and other visa related problems.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Nothing to report

4. Challenges

One of the challenges resulting in large numbers of applications is that people try building their travel history making it easier to obtain other visas afterwards. A number of agencies in the country are facilitating the process and making profits/ visa scam. Another issue is *visa-shopping*, when applicants intend to travel to other destinations but still opt for applying for visa at an Embassy here instead of going via Visa Application Centers (VFS Global).

5. Other issues

Nothing to report



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA AND
TO THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NIGERIA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

4. Introduction

Key issues on the location and number of Member States (MS) and non-MS issuing Schengen visas are as follows:

- Schengen visas are issued in both Abuja and Lagos;
- in Abuja there are sixteen (16) Schengen MS and two (2) non-MS (Norway and Switzerland), of which thirteen (13) Schengen MS and the two (2) non-MS issue Schengen visas; and
- in Lagos there are five Schengen MS Consulate Generals (or similar) of which four (4) issue Schengen visas; the one (1) non-MS with an office in Lagos does not issue visas.

The table in Annex summarises the situation of Schengen Area countries and their responsibilities.

5. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Ten LSC meetings were held in the year 2016-2017, six in Abuja, and four in Lagos.

1. 27th April 2016
2. 24th May 2016 (Lagos)
3. 29th June 2016
4. 4th July 2016 (Lagos)
5. 31st August 2016
6. 10th November 2016 (Lagos)
7. 14th November 2016
8. 13th December 2016
9. 16th February 2017 (Lagos)
10. 24th February 2017

All meetings, which are chaired by the EU Delegation, were well attended. Non-Schengen Member States, Ireland and the UK do not participate; both Bulgaria and Romania are invited to participate. Key issues addressed have been enhancing coordination with Immigration Liaison Officers (in Lagos), the collection Schengen visa statistics, and improved exchanges with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

One ad-hoc meetings were held on "Applicant Verification" organised by the Austrian Embassy on 1st March 2017, with about twenty people in attendance.

The meetings in Lagos coordinated by the EU Delegation were more frequent in 2019-17 than the previous year. In addition the Lagos Consuls took the initiative supported by the EUD to

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

coordinate their work with the Immigration Liaison Officers so that the meetings from 4th July 2016 onwards have been jointly organised as LSC/ILO meetings. One of the benefits of this cooperation has been the better sharing of experience, including a joint site visit to Lagos airport on 16th February 2017, kindly organised by NL.

Minutes of meetings are prepared and shared with Member States at the subsequent meeting. Meetings in Abuja are organised to take place in principle on the last Friday of every other month (starting February), with exceptions arising during holiday periods. Meetings in Lagos are organised on a more ad-hoc basis.

6. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

MS and the EUD are able to carry out the tasks on LSC mentioned in the visa code. During 2016-2017 steps have been taken to follow-up on some of the aspects of Article 48 of the visa code.

- *Lagos*: continued involvement and communication with the Lagos Consuls, which are responsible for around three-quarters of the Schengen visas issued; cooperation has been strengthened notably with the participation of Immigration Liaison Officers.
- *Immigration Liaison Officers*: a review was carried out on 20th September 2017 of Regulation 377/2004 of 19 February 2004 on the creation of an Immigration Liaison Officers Network.
- *Common criteria for examining applications for exemptions (Art 48(1)(b))*: this matter was not to be pursued, since the responsibility does not lie at the level of LSC.
- *Exhaustive list of travel documents issues by host country (Art 48(1)(c))*: no such list exists, and despite repeated attempts to obtain this list from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs no progress has been made. However, the recently issued Immigration Regulations 2017 (1st March 2017) identifies five types of “Passport”: (i) Standard Nigerian Passport; (ii) Nigerian Diplomatic Passport; (iii) Nigerian Official Passport; (iv) Nigerian Pilgrim’s Passport; and (v) Seaman’s Passport or Seaman’s Certificate of Identity.
- *Common Information Sheet (Art 48(2))*: A Common Information Sheet exists. However, use of the Common Information Sheet varies between different Member States. A summary of the use of Member States as of end-April 2016 can be found in the attached annex.
- *Monthly Statistics (Art 48(3)(a))*: A format for the collection of monthly statistics was agreed between the Schengen states. The collection of statistics in this format took place during 2016 every quarter. However, some improvements can be made to ensure the timely distribution of the information supplied by Member States. [comparison between official visa statistics and the figures collected every quarter]
- *Assessment of migratory and/or security risks (Art 48(3)(b))*: The general security matters are usually discussed in other for a. It has not been felt necessary at the moment to address this matter in the Local Schengen Cooperation Meeting.
- *Information on cooperation with transport companies (Art 48(3)(c))*: No major problematic matters were identified by those issuing visas; but ILOs have identified some airlines as being less than cooperative at airport check-in.
- *Information on insurance companies (Art 48(3)(d))*: The agreed format has been circulated, but was not updated in 2016-17. No harmonised list exists.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The harmonised list of supporting documents (Art 48(1)(a) of the Visa Code) was approved by a Commission Implementing Decision of 6.8.2012 C(2012)5310 final. No formal monitoring has been undertaken of the harmonised list. As was reported last year all MS state that they are using the list, but have in LSC meeting identified a number of issues:

- should be clear that these are minimum requirements;
- sometimes not clear what is needed, for example, what is meant by "proof of employment";
- the list does not determine how you act on the information – in some cases MS will refuse a visa if there is no proof of accommodation; for other MS this is not the case;
- visa shopping still taking place – even between Lagos and Abuja;
- No reference to Travel Medical Insurance is included in the list

At present no amendments have been proposed to the harmonised list. There has been no request to carry out a review of this harmonised list.

3.3 Exchange of information

Exchange of information takes place between the MS issuing Schengen visas. This exchange of information takes place through email – especially when fraudulent practices have been identified. Focusing mainly on the issues for which reporting is required the following observations can be made:

- Statistics are examined on a quarterly basis, although the collection and checking of this information requires considerable effort (see above, section 3.1).
- Sensitive issues: there has only been limited discussion of sensitive issues of malpractice;
- Travel Medical Insurance: sharing of information has been carried out, but needs to be updated.
- Cost of Schengen visas: there was an exchange of information on the cost of Schengen Visas, including the observation that the €60 costs has not been changed for many years and furthermore is considerably cheaper than the cost of obtaining a visa for Nigeria (Annex 2 contains information on the cost of visas).

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

An initiative to improve information exchange with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by inviting the Director of the Consular and Immigration Division to discuss Schengen visa issues with the Schengen states. This discussion took place at the April 2016 meeting in Abuja. The meeting brought into focus the very different perceptions that existed between officials in the MFA and those issuing visas. On the whole the MFA expressed concern about what they saw as the arbitrary denial of visas; whilst MS expressed concern about the number of fraudulent visa applications.

It is worth noting the initiative of the LSC in Lagos to enhance their cooperation with ILOs – an initiative which it is planned to expand to Abuja, and indeed through enhanced cooperation between Abuja and Lagos.

In addition on 1st February 2017 a European Migration Liaison Officer was appointed in the EU Delegation. One of the aims will be to enhance cooperation notably in line with Regulation No 377/2004 (see above in section 3.1).

At the meeting of 24th February 2017 the LSC meeting discussed the Regional Schengen Cooperation Officers Project and its initiative supported by NL, PT, DE, and IT to enhance cooperation between MS. A survey is to be carried out in this area.

4. Challenges

In 2016-2017 the collection of visa statistics, although difficult improved. It was not possible to complete a tender process and establish a harmonised list of Travel Medical Insurance companies as had previously been planned due to the departure of a key member of staff.

The main challenges for 2017-2018 are: (i) maintaining an efficient collection of Schengen visa statistics; (ii) sharing of information on Travel Medical Insurance companies; (iii) ensuring the wider use of the the Common Information Sheet/FAQs; (iv) enhancing cooperation between LSC and ILOs and in particular to address the challenges that exist in Nigeria on the issues of fraudulent practices, and smuggling and trafficking. Attention might also be given to having a better understanding of migrant profiles and the risks mentioned in Art 48(3)(b) of the Visa Code or of the ILO Regulation 377/2004.

5. Other issues

No other issues to be raised.

Table: Representation of Schengen Area countries in Abuja and Lagos⁽ⁱ⁾

No	Abuja				Lagos (Consulate General) ⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾				Schengen Visa Costs (Naira, unless otherwise stated)		
	Present	Issuing Schengen visas	Use of external service provider	Use of CIS/FAQ ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾	Present	Issuing Schengen visas	Use of external service provider	Use of CIS/FAQ	Visa Cost (Naira)	Service Provider Cost	Comments
1	AT	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					20,600	10,350	
2	BE	Yes + EE, LT, LU, NL	Yes - VFS	Yes					21,000	9,100	Rate set by Brussels
3	CZ	Yes	No	No					30,200	na	Change every month based on monthly exchange rate
4	DE	Yes - mainly government	No	Yes	DE	Yes	No	Yes	??	Na	€60 equivalent mentioned on website
5	DK	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes	DK	No	na	na	20,500	20,260	
6	EL	Yes	No	No					??	na	
7	ES	Yes - mainly government	Yes - BLS in Lagos	No	ES	Yes	Yes - BLS	No	19,700	5,100	
8	FI	Yes	No	Yes					19,900		Changes if price moves by more than 5%
9	FR	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes	FR	Yes + NL, LT	Yes - VFS	Yes	20,400		
10	HU	Yes	No	No							
11	IT	Yes - mainly government	Yes: VFS then Lagos	No	IT	Yes + MT ^(vi)	Yes - VFS	No	20,690	9,660	Update according to the exchange rate every month
12	NL	No - visas issued by BE	na	na	NL	No - visas issued by FR	na	na	na	na	
13	PL	Yes	No	No					20,400	na	Change the price every quarter
14	PT	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					20,625	10,320	
15	SK	No	na	na					na	na	Change 3-4 times a year
16	SE	Yes + LV, SK	Yes - VFS	Yes					21,000	10,500	
17	CH	Yes	No	No	CH ^(v)	No	No	No	20,500		
18	NO	Yes	Yes - VFS	Yes					€60		Paid in Euro through online portal

Notes:

(i) The non-Schengen MS present in Nigeria are: (a) Abuja: Bulgaria, Ireland, Romania, and the UK; (b) Lagos: UK

(ii) CIS/FAQ: Common Information Sheet/Frequently Asked Questions (Art 48(2) of the Visa Code) agreed in the LSC meeting, 24th June 2015

(iii) Honorary Consuls are not mentioned; the "Embassy Office" of the Netherlands is included

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In Pakistan, the following Member States issue Schengen visas: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands, Switzerland and Norway all in Islamabad. The following MS also issue Schengen visas in their respective Consulate General in Karachi: Germany and Italy. Representation arrangements exist as follows: Belgium for Luxemburg, Czech Republic for Slovak Republic, Denmark for Iceland, Germany for Latvia and Slovenia, Hungary for Lithuania and Estonia, Italy for Malta, The Netherlands for Finland and Switzerland for Liechtenstein.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Eight LSC meetings were held in Islamabad during the reporting period, with a gap in the Summer 2016 due to change in personnel at the EU Delegation in charge of chairing the meetings. The meetings are rather well attended although the presence of all MS has never been achieved. Since November 2016, the Chair drafts and distributes minutes of the meetings to participants.

Besides regular LSC, many MS attend on a regular basis the informal "Anti-Fraud Group" that gathers representatives of Schengen MS, UK, and like-minded missions (US, Canada, Australia) and forms a useful platform for exchange of information.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen MS missions are well equipped to apply the Visa Code, with often very seasoned officers in charge. About half of the missions rely on visa facilitation centres to receive visa applications, in view of the number of applications and security considerations. One MS relies on a regional centre for visa decisions. The workload is important for Schengen missions, which all note the issue of generalised fraud as a significant part of the context. Fake and false documentation are most problematic. Missions debunk imaginative fraudulent schemes routinely. Interviews are conducted in a series of cases. Out of about 70000 visa applications received in total by all Schengen missions in 2016, only about a third of them are refused. 2016 show a sharp increase in applications (about +26 %) with a proportionally lesser increase in refusals (about + 18%). The increase was particularly striking for one MS, indicating a potential risk of "visa shopping".

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

With the change of personnel in the 2016 rotation, the EU Delegation has improved its capacity to ensure the expected LSC tasks under the Visa Code, including submitting for the first time a LSC Islamabad Annual Report.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

While there is no Commission Decision regarding a harmonised list of documents, the requirements are de facto harmonised. There is a proposal at the LSC in Islamabad to formalise the list of harmonised documents and submit it for decision at a Visa Committee in the near future.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

While there is no harmonised practice regarding issuance of Multiple Entry Visas (MEVs), and no systematic statistics for short term visas, the trend amongst MS in Pakistan is to issue single or 2-entry visas. For MEVs of 1 year and above validity, the practice amongst missions, consist in issuance of 1-year MEV for roughly 80 to 90%, and the remainder spread in 2 up to 5-year MEVs. By and large, however the longest MEVs are issued in very discrete numbers to well-known contacts with whom the missions have long established relationships.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings have been used as a platform to exchange information on

- Statistics and trends in visa applications;
- cases of fraud and attempted fraudulent schemes, including exploitation of Directive 2004/38/EC;
- travel medical insurance (TMI) companies and update of lists of approved companies;
- humanitarian visa;
- implementation of the Visa Information System;
- use of VIS Mail (not yet implemented by several missions);
- complaints by visa applicants.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The LSC group received the Delhi-based officer, deployed in the framework of the "Regional Schengen Cooperation Officers (RSCO) Project" funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Union. The RSCO also interacted bilaterally with a series of diplomatic missions in Islamabad. The LSC would welcome the RSCO support towards establishing a task force to deal with fraud cases. The LSC also alerted the RSCO on abuses in the implementation of Directive 2004/38/EC.

A "European Migration Liaison Officer" took his duties at the EU Delegation on 1 March 2017 with the mandate to henceforward attend the LSC meetings in Islamabad.

4. Challenges

Addressing fraud and fraudulent practices and schemes are the main challenges for Schengen missions in Pakistan. The LSC will therefore continue to focus on these issues through harmonised practices and regular exchanges information. Similarly, the misuse of Directive 2004/38/EC will continue to be documented.

In the forthcoming reporting period, the LSC will look at further harmonising practices.

5. Other issues

Pakistan is a sensitive country regarding illegal immigration. The EU and Pakistan have concluded in 2010 an Agreement on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation (Council Decision 2010/649/EU; text published in the Official Journal L287, 04/11/2010, p. 52) that aims at facilitating the return of illegal immigrants from that country but also nationals from other countries who have transited through Pakistan before arriving in the EU. A Joint Readmission Committee monitors the functioning of the agreement. Separate EU coordination meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation in relation to the Readmission Agreement.

In January 2017, Norway and Pakistan signed a Readmission Agreement that aims at streamlining the return of irregular migrants on a reciprocal basis. The agreement was not yet in force at the end of this reporting period.

Pakistan has concluded visa waiver agreements for short term periods with a series of EU and Schengen States, some of which not represented in Islamabad, for diplomatic and/or official passports holders as follows:

Country	Duration	Passport type
Austria	3 months	Diplomatic & Official
Belgium	3 months	Diplomatic
Czech Republic	3 months	Diplomatic & Official
Denmark	3 months	Diplomatic & Official
Finland	3 months	Diplomatic
Germany	3 months	Diplomatic
Greece	SUSPENDED	Diplomatic
Luxemburg	3 months	Diplomatic
Malta	1 month	Diplomatic & Official
The Netherlands	3 months	Diplomatic
Norway	3 month	Diplomatic & Official
Romania	1 month	Diplomatic & Official
Slovak Republic	3 months	Diplomatic & Official

This report was approved by the LSC group at its meeting held on 11 April 2017.



16/5/2017

PERU: LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In March 2016, the EU-Peru reciprocal short-stay visa waiver agreement entered into force. As a result, the Heads of EU Missions decided that LSC-specific meetings would no longer take place from the second half of 2016 onwards. If necessary, Schengen-related issues will be dealt with in the EU Consular Group meetings.

The EU Member States represented by an Embassy in Peru are: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Each Embassy has a Consular Section/General Consulate. The consular division of the Swiss Embassy is part of LSC.

As regards Schengen representation in Peru, the following agreements are in place:

- Germany represents Lithuania.
- Austria represents Malta and Slovenia.
- Belgium represents Luxembourg.
- Spain represents Slovakia.
- Finland represents Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Two LSC meetings were held in the first half of 2016. They were attended by most of the European Union consulates present plus Switzerland and the EU Delegation, which chaired the meetings held in its headquarters and drew up the minutes.

The EU Consular Meetings were chaired by the Netherlands in 2016 and by Spain in the first half of 2017.

Schengen issues were also discussed at the meetings of the EU Heads of Mission, Consuls and Political Advisers regarding the Schengen visa waiver process for Peruvian citizens concluded on 14 March 2016 with the signing of the EU-Peru Agreement.

The agendas for these consular meetings include several subjects of common interest, such as the situation of prisoners in Peruvian prisons who are nationals of EU and Schengen countries; the new legislative framework on migration (Law on Migration, Implementing Regulation and Single Text of Administrative Procedures (TUPA)); issues relating to removals of EU tourists who enter the country without having their passport stamped; security risks; management of natural disasters, etc.

In the last year, non Schengen-area EU countries were no longer taking part in LSC meetings. In the past, these countries were invited to attend to discuss issues of common interest.

No LSC meetings are held outside Lima.

3. Current situation

3.1. Implementation of the Visa Code

The EU Delegation prepared the agendas of the Schengen meetings based on the most recent priorities and major events, while the Acting Chair of the EU Consular Group chaired the

¹ April 2016-March 2017

meetings.

In 2016, there were two subjects dealt with systematically at the meetings of the LSC and EU consuls: a) the implementation of the EU-Peru Agreement on the Schengen visa waiver for Peruvian citizens; and b) the introduction of biometric passports by Peru.

The exchanges of information and coordination between the Consuls on matters relating to the Visa Code and its application have been *constant* and satisfactory.

3.2. Assessment of the need to harmonise the list of supporting documents used to verify that entry requirements are met

The list of documents used to prove the purpose and conditions of a planned stay has not been harmonised, but the differences are minor. Harmonisation is complicated since it does not depend on the consulates. For example, the visa fee is set by each capital. However, since the differences in fees are slight, it has not been deemed necessary to harmonise them.

There is no common information sheet, but the information provided by Schengen consulates is similar.

3.3. Exchange of information

Monthly statistics: statistics are not systematically provided.

Cases of fraud: alteration of visas, alteration of dates of entry and exit stamps, false certificates of employment, alteration of bank data taken from the internet and bigamy.

Travel medical insurance (TMI): there are insurance companies that offer TMI, but the Consuls report on specific instances of failure to activate the insurance and forged TMI documents.

Travel documents issued by Peru - there are three types of passport:

- Ordinary passport ;
- Diplomatic passport;
- Special passport.

On 25 February 2016, Peru began issuing biometric passports and ceased production of conventional/ non-biometric passports on 31 July 2016.

3.4. Other LSC initiatives

Information was exchanged through LSC on those topics that were needed during the preparation of the signing of the EU-Peru reciprocal short-stay visa waiver agreement for Peruvian citizens.

LSC has drawn up a common information sheet on the requirements for Peruvians to enter the Schengen area without a visa, sharing information with the Peruvian authorities in the process (Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Migration Office). The sheet is available on the websites of the consulates and embassies.

4. Challenges

The most important development for the Schengen Area Member States in 2016-2017 was the implementation of the EU-Peru Schengen visa waiver agreement.

During the first year of the entry into force of the Agreement, no major problems have been detected at airports/points of entry to the Schengen area.

The main challenges expected for 2017-2018 are:

- Continued monitoring of the impact of the Agreement on Peruvian passenger flows to the Schengen area and potential entry problems.
- Continued direct contact between EU Consuls, and frank and constant dialogue leading to rapid solutions.
- Coordination with the National Authorities to find solutions to any difficulties that may arise in the context of the Agreement.

5. Other issues

All the Embassies/Consulates involved in Local Schengen Cooperation have approved this Report.



14 July 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in the PHILIPPINES 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

A total of 14 Schengen members (BE, CH, CZ, DE, HU, ES, FR, EL, IT, NL, DK, NO, SE and AT) are represented in the Philippines. To date, the current representation arrangements on visa matters for the non-resident MS are as follows:

AT represents Lithuania

BE represents Luxembourg, Hungary (HU will start issuing Schengen visas in 2017), Slovenia

CZ represents Slovakia

EL represents Portugal

NL represents Poland and Latvia

NO represents Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Estonia

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

LSC meetings take place on a quarterly basis at the EU Delegation (EUD). They are well attended. LSC meetings are organised and chaired by the EUD. One ad hoc meeting was organised in November 2016, jointly with the LSC at the Embassy of Canada.

The Minutes/Reports of the meetings are drawn up by EUD.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Schengen Visa Code is followed by Members States in the Philippines. A large number of Schengen visas are granted to Filipino seafarers.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

In September 2014, COM Decision C(2014) 6146 of 3.9.2014 establishing the list of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants was adopted. For the time being, it is considered that there is no need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Exchange of information

3.3.1 Monthly statistics

¹ May 2016 – April 2017

Most Schengen MS Embassies submit statistics on a regular basis.

3.3.2 Cases of fraud

Information regarding specific or suspicious causes of fraud is pro-actively shared between European Embassies and in the LSC framework. Common cases encountered were on document fraud by applicants and/or the authorities, practices of human trafficking, including by several identified travel agencies.

3.3.3 Travel Medical Insurance (TMI)

The LSC has and MS Embassies have a shared list of TMI agencies that they regularly worked with. Most of these agencies are used by Schengen visa applicants. Only insurance companies offering the requirements of the Visa Code are accepted. A list of recommended insurance companies exists.

3.3.4 Others issues

Other topics that have been discussed during LSC meetings are the following:

- Admissibility of Philippine passports with validity extension;
- Requested duration of travel insurance coverage;
- Best practices on past cases/refusals and criteria for visa granting;
- Information on visa shopping;
- Duration of visa validity allocated to seafarers;
- Visas on arrival for seafarers in the Schengen area;
- Asylum seekers and refugees visiting the Embassies.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Meeting with the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)

In September 2016, following prior coordination with the LSC, the EU delegation, together with one Schengen Member Country had a meeting with DFA regarding the list of valid Filipino travel documents.

The meeting was an opportunity to clarify the following issues: required length of validity of Filipino passports to enable travel abroad; extension of the length of validity of Philippine passports, family petition request; falsification of identity; recognition of marriage concluded under foreign law; conditions of return to the maiden name for a Filipina who was married under foreign law; length of validity of passport delivered to Filipino infants; problems related to legalization of Filipino documents by the Philippine authorities.

The outcome of the meeting was shared and discussed with the LSC.

Cooperation with other groups

Exchange of good practices with like-minded non-Schengen countries is considered useful by the LSC in the Philippines. On November 4, 2016, there was a joint workshop between the

Five Countries Conference (composed of UK, Australia, USA, Canada and New Zealand) and the Local Schengen Coordination Group on visa matters.

The focus of the workshop was the Filipino Seafarers movement from a program integrity perspective. It was recalled that the Filipino seafarers comprise 30% of the more than 1.2 million mariners worldwide, making the Philippines the manning capital of the world. While the general consensus was that the seafarer movement in the Philippines is low-risk, it was acknowledged that seafarers faced risk of exploitation.

4. Challenges

The significant of visas on arrival granted to seafarers has been identified as a topic to follow in the coming years.

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC)
in the REPUBLIC OF KOREA
2016-2017 REPORT¹**

1. Introduction

21 EU Member States (EU MS) out of 28 are present in the Republic of Korea (RoK). Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Slovenia cover the RoK from their embassies located in Beijing or Tokyo.

The agreements of representation in consular matters are as follows:

- Embassy of Austria represents Croatia and Malta (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Belgium represents Luxembourg,
- Embassy of Italy represents Slovenia,
- Embassy of Poland represents Estonia (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Slovakia represents Latvia (Schengen visa issues),
- Embassy of Sweden deals with the visa requests that are addressed to Denmark, Iceland and Norway, as part of the agreement of cooperation of the Nordic Council,
- Embassy of Switzerland represents Liechtenstein.

Finland provided consular services to Estonian nationals in the past.

European citizens in the RoK are relatively small in volume and count for almost 18,000 registered foreigners². As elsewhere, it is not easy to assess the exact number of expatriates in real-time given that consular registration is generally not mandatory. EU MS/Schengen countries proceed with their consular work without any particular difficulty.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

From April 2016 to March 2017, 4 formal coordination meetings were held, on 10 May, 6 October and 16 November 2016, and on 23 February 2017. In addition, the group visited Incheon International Airport on 7 April 2016.

During the reported period EU MS/Schengen local consular group meetings were chaired by the local chair. The Netherlands exercised the local chair until the end of June 2016, while Slovakia, in the absence of Malta, chairs until the end of June 2017.

Meeting reports were prepared by the local chair in cooperation with the EU Delegation or by the EU Delegation. Participation of MS in these meetings is satisfactory. Among the 21 MS that are present in the RoK, around 18-20 participate in our meetings. Switzerland and Norway attend meetings regularly (Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have diplomatic representations in the RoK). The EU Delegation supports the local chair in its coordination work. All meetings took place at the EU Delegation's premises.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Data of the Korea Immigration Service for 2015

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the Visa-free regime with the RoK, the LSC discussions on the application of the Visa Code were fairly limited and discussed only when problematical cases were brought up by EU MS/Schengen countries (as reported below).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The LSC started a process of re-examining the usefulness of preparing a harmonized list of supporting documents. An overview was compiled by the EU Delegation of respective supporting documents required by the EU MS/Schengen countries in order to identify any differences and best practises. Based on this overview, the EU Delegation prepared a summary of supporting documents for further deliberation at the LSC meetings and an eventual decision.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

During the process of updating the Consular Handbook, the LSC touched upon the issue of using stamps for VISA requests / refusals, which are still used by some EU MS.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings are appreciated as a good platform to exchange consular-related information. In 2016, the LSC noted an increase of fraudulent applications for Schengen visa mainly from citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh, who used similar types of exploration visits and arguments to apply for the Schengen Visa.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

During the reported period, the LSC also:

- Exchanged experience on increased cases of the screening of diplomatic pouches by Korean authorities and on varying level of VIP treatment at Incheon International Airport;
- Updated its Consular Handbook in 2016 and started discussion on the joint EU Consular Preparedness Framework in Seoul;
- Enhanced relations with the Korean authorities responsible for public safety and security and immigration, respectively while noting continued challenges in dealing with the MOFA;
- Assessed security (DPRK nuclear and ballistic tests; demonstrations) and safety (cases of cholera) situation in the RoK in view of adapting the travel advice according the situation.

4. Challenges

For the period 2017-2018, the LSC will be focusing on following key initiatives:

- Preparation for the Winter Olympic/Paralympic Games to be held in February 2018 in the RoK;
- Elaboration of the joint EU Consular Preparedness Framework in Seoul.

5. Other issues

This report has been cleared with the local Schengen Consular group.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

24/04/2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MOSCOW and ST-PETERSBURG 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

All Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in Moscow with the exception of Liechtenstein which is represented by Switzerland.

17 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in St. Petersburg². Belgium, Denmark, Malta, Portugal and Sweden only rely on ESPs in St. Petersburg. In addition, in St. Petersburg Austria is represented by Finland, Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland, Luxembourg by the Netherlands and Slovenia by Latvia.

At the end of April 2017, only few of the Member States do not use external service providers for the collection of visa applications, and representation arrangements have been established at least in Ekaterinburg (consular presence of 5 Member States), Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Pskov, Rostov on Don and Sovetsk.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

During the reporting period, ten regular LSC meetings were organised in Moscow³. All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUD) and well attended by Schengen Member States (as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania).

During the reporting period, two regular LSC meetings were organised in St-Petersburg⁴. After a 1,5 year break, the LSC meetings St-Petersburg were resumed and will be taking place every second month. All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUD) and well attended by Schengen Member States (as well as Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania).

EUD continued to draw up detailed draft summary reports of all LSC meetings and consulted the LSC groups before transmitting the approved reports to the European Commission. Several of the Member States shared the common reports with their respective capitals and some drew up their own reports.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² The Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland

³ In 2016 on 22 April, 3 June, 17 June, 19 July, 9 September, 14 October, 8 December and in 2017 on 17 January, 22 February, 22 March

⁴ In 2017 on 18 January and on 23 March

Alongside EUD's chairmanship of both groups, consulates in Moscow coordinate their practices closely with their colleagues in St. Petersburg and in other locations in Russia. The EUD shares by email all relevant documents, letters, statistics, policy updates from the European Commission, agendas and summary reports simultaneously with all Member States' consulates in Moscow, St-Petersburg, Ekaterinburg and other consulates present throughout Russia. Sensitive documents are shared with the Member States' embassies in Moscow via a special secure channel. Associated Member States collect the documents from the EUD in a sealed envelope.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Schengen Member States and EUD are generally very well prepared and staffed to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code and the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement although practical interpretation of many stipulations were discussed in LSC meetings (see below point 3.3.).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The agreed harmonised list of supporting documents is legally binding and is being adequately implemented in Moscow following the COM Implementing Decision of June 2016. Practical implementation was on the LSC meeting agendas intermittently during the reporting period and following the request of one Member State the revision of the list was discussed in detail. Around half of the Member States would like to keep the proof of a hotel reservation on the list, while another half consider that in the case of Russia it is not needed anymore as other supporting documents provide the necessary background information.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

During the reporting period, the LSC discussions on the harmonisation of practices were dominated by questions relating to the issuance of MEVs, Crimea non-recognition policy and visas for human rights' defenders:

- *Issuance of MEVs to first time applicants* – During the reporting period it was confirmed that practices regarding the issuing of MEVs to first time applicants widely differ between Member States. The groups were reminded, in line with the conclusions of several Visa Committee meetings in Brussels, that the systematic issuing of MEVs to first time applicants on the ground that "Russian nationals do not present a migratory risk" leads to 'visa shopping' and is not compatible with the Visa Code and the Visa Facilitation Agreement. For these reasons, several Member States made calls for the establishment of common practices/internal guidelines for the issuance of Schengen MEVs.
- *Crimea non-recognition policy* – The groups looked at how to better implement the June 2016 guidelines on the non-recognition of certain Russian passports as Russian authorities changed their practices and issuance codes following their discovery of the guidelines. Regarding the territorial competence, all MS confirmed that they refer Crimean residents who attempt to apply in Russia to the EU consulates in Ukraine;

- *Schengen visas issued to human rights' defenders* – The groups discussed in detail the issue of people-to-people contacts, namely how to better implement the existing flexibilities for human rights' defenders, how to define the target group and reviewed the guidelines under preparation by the European Commission and the EEAS;

Some LSC meetings in Moscow were followed by the dedicated consular protection meetings organised by the respective rotating Presidencies.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC discussed regularly monthly statistics; in 2016 a 8.4% drop in applications in the Russian Federation was registered, coming on top of an almost 40% decrease in 2015. Nonetheless, the 3.2 million visa applications lodged in Russia still made it the top source country for Schengen visa applications. The visa refusal rate has slightly decreased from 1,3% in 2015 to 1,2% in 2016. The LSC agreed to start gathering and discussing statistics on a quarterly basis. Many Member States do not have the technical capacity to provide MEVs statistics according to the length of their validity

The share of MEVs issued in Russia has strongly increased yet once again from 70% in 2015 to 80,6% in 2016, which is a new record for Russia. This stands in strong contrast with the share of MEVs issued to EU citizens by Russia in 2015 which was at only 45%. Several MS expressed concern regarding this lack of reciprocity regarding the issuance of MEVs, due to Russia's restrictive consular policies and national legislation. This large and increasing gap might undermine the implementation of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement.

Another area of perceived lack of reciprocity in the implementation of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement was identified - several MS reported on increasing cases of EU citizens who are requested supporting documents outside the scope of the VFA, namely for the categories of journalists, cultural exchanges and civil society.

A third area that could undermine the reciprocity of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement was Russia's decision to grant unilateral preferential treatment for tourist MEVs for citizens from 6 Member States. The Member States were not consulted by Russia on this decision and will not reciprocate.

In terms of Russia's visa policy were discussed the potential introduction by Russia of fingerprinting for EU citizens, the issue of the crossing interdiction of the Belarus-Russia border by EU citizens, the slight increase of Russian passports issued to residents of the non-recognised entities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as to residents of Donbass.

Information on cases of fraud and refusals was regularly exchanged within the LSC (and through the local anti-fraud group). Falsified proof of economic activity, fake hotel bookings and financial documents are still wide-spread among applicants, while some local tour operators are helping applicants to get falsified supporting documents. Cases of medical insurances used for expensive treatment in the EU are ongoing. Additionally, assessment of migratory and security risks, use of false/counterfeit/forged documents, illegal immigration routes and interruptions of airport transit were discussed mainly, but not exclusively at the meetings of the EU-Immigration Liaison officers network (EU-ILOs) in Moscow, in which several of the Member States' consuls take part.

On the topic of VIS implementation feedback and fine-tuning were discussed the issue of double fingerprinting in VIS or insufficient quality of the data, issue of nationality at birth in passports, issue of fingerprints transfer in IT systems, VIS quality requirements, refusal of fingerprinting by Russian officials.

Cooperation with external service providers, travel agencies and travel insurance companies such as the monitoring and mapping of external service providers (ESPs) and the opening of new ESPs offices were discussed.

The groups were informed of relevant events and developments such as expert meetings under the EU-Russia Migration Dialogue, EU-Russia Joint Readmission Committee and the EU-Russia Joint Visa Facilitation Committee). The Moscow LSC group was associated and provided input for the preparation of the December 2016 EU-Russia Joint Visa Facilitation Committee.

The Member States reported that very few asylum seekers are applying at the Member States consulates for refugee status or national humanitarian visas.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

A joint meeting of the Moscow Local Schengen Cooperation group with the EU Member State Science Counsellors group with external guest speakers was organised to present short-stay visa and legal migration provisions and their practical applications for the mobility of scientists, researchers and students between the European Union and Russia.

4. Challenges

As regards the challenges indicated in previous reports, the implementation of the amended EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement based on a reciprocity principle and the full integration of Bulgaria or Romania into Schengen were challenges also for 2016-2017 and they will remain for the next reporting period as well.

The full and proper implementation of the rules regarding the issuance of MEVs with long validity and MEVs for first time applicants will remain high on the agenda.

The legal and practical consequences of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation would require particular vigilance and coordination by the Member States and EUD in order to make sure that appropriate and timely responses are devised for new measures implemented by Russia aiming at circumventing the non-recognition policies and guidelines.

In terms of staffing of the consulates, the peak months for each consulate vary, but might require for some of them the allocation of temporary reinforcements from the Member States' headquarters or consulates in the region. This was especially the case in the beginning of 2017 when several Member States experienced an increase of visa applications ranging from 50% to 200%.

It seems that some Member States were not systematically consulted by their capitals when policy documents relating to visa and mobility are being discussed in working groups in the Council.

5. Other issues

With around 60 consulates and 350 authorised visa centres across Russia from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok the Schengen Member States aims at making the process simple, fast and safe for citizens applying for visa, but the Russian Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR) demanded to extend the network of visa centres further due to geographical size of the country. The Schengen member states will continue to test some technical mobile alternatives, but member states believe that the current network of visa centres already covers over 90% of the Russian territory in terms of demand. In the light of challenging economic situation in Russia and visa applications in 2016 remaining broadly at the 2015 levels, the Schengen consulates and their visa centres will carefully assess how best to continue to ensure high quality of service for visa applicants in Russia.

The geographical size of the Russian Federation and the high number of applications continues to pose particular problems for the Schengen cooperation, which requires extensive coordination efforts on the side of the Member States and the EUD. Furthermore, given that the EU's visa policies and issuance are matters of high public and political interest in the Russian Federation, regular negative and somewhat distorted reporting in the Russian media and statements by the Russian authorities render the working conditions of the Schengen consulates and EUD more difficult. This situation has become worse with the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the consequent introduction of travel bans to a number of Russian individuals.

* * * * *

This LSC Moscow and St-Petersburg 2016-2017 report has been approved by all Member States present and EUD.



UNION EUROPEENNE
Délégation en République du Sénégal

Dakar, le 10 mai 2017

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS DES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU SENEGAL RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

Au Sénégal 13 Etats membres de l'UE sont représentés, 10 au niveau Ambassadeur : Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Pays-Bas, Portugal, Roumanie, Royaume-Uni et 3 au niveau Chargés d'affaires a.i.: le Luxembourg, la République Tchèque et la Pologne. La Suisse est représentée au niveau Ambassadeur.

Les consulats de AT, DE, BE, ES, FR, IT, NL, PT, RO, CH délivrent des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays qui se trouvent sous leur juridiction. La plupart des Ambassades des Etats membres au Sénégal sont accrédités pour plusieurs pays de la région, pour certaines jusqu'à 9 pays.

Concernant les Etats Membres non-représentés à Dakar, 5 Etats Membres (GR, HU, LT, MT, SI) disposent des accords pour la délivrance des visas avec les EM représentés. Le service consulaire et le service de visa de la Pologne dont l'Ambassade s'est ouverte récemment sera prochainement opérationnel.

2. Réunions LSC organisées pour la période 2016-2017

Les réunions de coordination sont tenues trimestriellement. Durant la période couverte par le rapport, trois réunions de coordination Schengen se sont tenues (juillet 2016, novembre 2016, mars 2017), avec une très bonne participation des Etats membres et de la Suisse. Entre les réunions, la circulation de l'information est assurée grâce à une liste de diffusion constituée à cet effet. Des réunions thématiques sont parfois organisées (prochainement un séminaire avec les banques, des réunions sur la fraude documentaire).

La Délégation de l'UE, représentée au niveau du Chef de la section Politique, Presse et Information, préside les réunions, qui se tiennent à tour de rôle dans les locaux des Ambassades des Etats membres volontaires pour les accueillir ou à la Délégation de l'UE. Les comptes rendus des réunions sont préparés par la Délégation de l'UE, qui établit également l'ordre du jour, incluant les contributions des Etats membres.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les Etats membres appliquent le code des visas. L'Espagne, la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas et le Portugal ont externalisé la réception des demandes de visas (sous-traitance avec la société

¹ Avril 2016 – Mars 2017

VfS Global pour FR, IT, NL et la société BLS pour l'Espagne). Le nombre des demandes de visa augmentent. Les pays qui reçoivent le plus de demandes sont la France, l'Italie et l'Espagne. Le taux de refus de visas reste élevé (autour de 40% en général).

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

L'harmonisation des pratiques concernant les documents justificatifs devant être fournis par les demandeurs de visas est acquise. Les réunions de coordination permettent d'échanger les informations sur les critères communs pour l'examen des demandes, sur les documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs, sur les pratiques des Etats membres, sur les cas de fraude documentaire et sur les filières d'immigration clandestine. Sont également échangés les statistiques des visas.

Les Etats membres ont discuté l'application de l'article Art. 48.3 (d) du Code des visas prévoyant l'échange d'information concernant les compagnies d'assurances spécialisées en assurance maladies de voyage. Les Etats membres ont conclu que compte tenu de l'absence de difficultés rencontrées dans la coopération avec les compagnies d'assurance au Sénégal et du risque de répercussions judiciaires en cas de publication d'une liste exhaustive des compagnies fournissant des assurances maladie adéquate, il n'est pas jugé nécessaire d'avoir une telle liste au Sénégal. Le Code des Visas prévoyant uniquement une coopération et un échange d'information dans ce domaine, un échange de vues informel lors des réunions de coordination est pratiqué. Certains Etats membres ont suggéré que le groupe pourrait recevoir le courtier en assurance utilisé par la société VfS Global pour un partage d'expérience.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Les EM prendront désormais en charge à tour de rôle la collecte des statistiques en matière de visa sur une base trimestrielle. Ces informations seront transmises au siège chaque année.

3.4 Echange d'informations

Conformément aux dispositions du code des visas, les réunions de coordination et la liste de diffusion servent à échanger les informations notamment sur les aspects suivants:

- La mise à jour des statistiques sur le nombre de demandes des visas et des les taux de refus.
- Les cas de fraude documentaire, le partage d'expériences sur la vérification d'authenticité des documents délivrés par l'Etat civil du Sénégal.
- La coopération avec les compagnies d'assurance qui offre une assurance de voyage supposément conforme au code des visas.
- L'évolution du contexte sécuritaire, socio-économique du pays partenaire et des pays de la région auprès desquels les Ambassades des EM sont accrédités.
- Les voies d'immigration illégales empruntées.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Participation de l'Officier de Coopération Régionale Schengen (RSCO)

Dans le cadre du projet de renforcement de l'efficacité de la coopération Schengen, l'Officier de Coopération régionale Schengen (RSCO), basé à Accra et ayant dans son mandat le

Sénégal, a été invité à participer aux deux réunions de coordination Schengen au Sénégal pendant la période couverte par le présent rapport.

Le RSCO a présenté aux Etats membres son mandat dans le cadre du projet financé par le Fond de sécurité intérieure de l'Union européenne, il a tenu des rencontres bilatérales avec un certain nombre des Etats membres lors de ses deux visites au Sénégal. Il a lancé un questionnaire pour recueillir des opinions sur l'utilité et l'efficacité de la coordination locale Schengen et pour identifier des opportunités d'amélioration de cette coopération (retour positif sur la fréquence des réunions et le partage des informations; feedback utile sur le rôle du Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer pour assister la DUE dans l'amélioration de la coopération Schengen locale: proposer des points à discuter lors des réunions; assister dans la compilation des statistiques; RSCO communiquera au groupe les rapports ou les newsletters de ses missions dans les autres pays de la région.

Les résultats de ce questionnaire ont été partagés lors de la dernière réunion de coordination et certaines suggestions ont été déjà mises en pratique.

Séminaire avec les principales banques établies au Sénégal

Il a été convenu qu'il serait utile d'organiser un séminaire avec les représentants des principales banques établies au Sénégal pour qu'elles présentent les caractéristiques de sécurité des relevés bancaires qu'elles fournissent. Ceci permettrait aux Etats membres de distinguer les documents authentiques des faux documents. Ce séminaire sera organisé fin mai.

4. Défis

La fraude consulaire continue à constituer un défi important. Le Sénégal reste l'un des principaux pays d'origine des filières d'immigration illégale en provenance de l'Afrique vers l'Europe.

La fraude documentaire reste importante, et concerne notamment: l'usurpation d'identité, création des comptes en banque factices, alimentés sur une très courte période; faux extraits bancaires, fausses réservations de vols et d'hôtel. Les demandes de visas effectuées par des artistes et des sportifs sont souvent susceptibles d'être fausses. Concernant les fraudes liées à l'état civil, le manque de formation des autorités locales dans la détection des faux documents est déploré.

Un autre défi que la Délégation a signalé auprès des services compétents de la DG HOME est le besoin de formation de la Délégation sur le rôle de coordonnateur local Schengen. Des conseils pratiques de la DG HOME sur les réunions, leur animation, les informations à échanger etc., ainsi que des échanges des pratiques entre les délégations de la région seraient bienvenus.

5. Divers

Le Sénégal étant l'un des 5 pays prioritaires dans le cadre du Cadre de Partenariat sur les Migrations, un officier de liaison Migration a rejoint la DUE en février 2017. Elle a été présentée au groupe LSC lors de la réunion de mars 2017 et a partagé avec les EM les informations recueillies lors de sa participation à une réunion sur la fraude documentaire

organisée par le Consulat du Canada au Sénégal. Elle participera désormais aux réunions LSC.

Ce rapport a été préparé par la Délégation de l'UE au Sénégal et partagé avec les Etats membres de l'Espace Schengen. Il a été approuvé le 10 mai.



15/05/2017

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) SERBIA
2016-2017 REPORT¹**

1. Introduction

Nineteen States applying common visa policy are represented in Serbia, i.e. 17 Member States (BE, CZ, DK, DE, GR, ES, FR, IT, HU, NL, AT, PL, PT, SI, SK, FI, SE) and 2 associated States (NO, CH).

All the consular and visa offices are sections of the Embassies and are located in the capital, Belgrade. IT and HU also have a Vice-Consulate and Consulate General in Subotica.

The 4 MS that do not yet apply the common visa policy but have committed to doing so (BG, RO, CY, HR) are also present in Belgrade. RO also has two Consulates General in Vršac and Zaječar, BG has a Consulate General in Niš, while HR has a Consulate General in Subotica. Among States which decided not to apply the visa policy, only the UK is represented in Belgrade.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

The EU Delegation to Serbia has been coordinating the LSC meetings since April 2010. The meetings are regularly organised usually once per semester and prepared and chaired by the EUD.

Two meetings were held in the reporting period. The first one took place on 08/06/2016 (the meeting was attended by 13 States applying the common visa policy and 2 States committed to applying it) and the second one on 02/03/2017 (the meeting was attended by 10 States applying the common visa policy and 2 States committed to applying it). Both meetings were chaired by the EUD's Head of the Political Section.

Reports of LSC meeting were drawn by the EUD, and then distributed to MS for comments and once cleared, circulated again for forwarding to the respective capitals and to DG Home. Invitations were also sent to locations outside the capital of the countries applying the common visa policy or which are committed to doing so, as well as reports.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

¹ April 2016– March 2017

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According to Regulation (EC) No 1244/2009, since 19 December 2009 biometric Serbian passports (excluding those issued by the Serbian Coordination Directorate - *Koordinaciona uprava*, which undertook the competence of issuing passports to residents in Kosovo*) are visa free.

Visas are almost exclusively issued to third country nationals residing in Serbia.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Following a discussion on the Visa Committee's finding, NL as coordinator of the working group on the harmonized list of supporting documents, drafted a new version which was circulated to the MS and afterwards submitted to DG Home.

3.3 Exchange of information

Information is exchanged among Schengen States on monthly statistics. EUD also timely exchanged information coming from HQs.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

There have not been taken any other initiatives in the reporting period. There was however common agreement that a training on forged documents, as has been provided by FRONTEX last year, could be beneficial.

4. Challenges in 2017-2018

As has been seen by previous discussions, the unification of issuing policies regarding third country nationals holding diplomatic or service passports will be the next topic to deal with.

5. Other issues

The present LSC report has been circulated among LSC Serbia and has been cleared on 15/5/2017.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS
AND VANUATU
Head of Administration – local point LSC

Honiara, le 10 mai 2017.

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS
ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
ILES SALOMON & REPUBLIQUE DU VANUATU
RAPPORT 2016-2017**

1. Introduction

La Délégation couvre les Iles Salomon et la République du Vanuatu.

Aux Iles Salomon, seul le Royaume-Uni est représenté au niveau de "High Commission". On trouve également un Consul Honoraire de France, Allemagne et Suède qui n'est pas investi des pouvoirs de délivrer des visas.

A Vanuatu, Seule la République Française est représentée au niveau d'ambassade. On trouve également des Consuls Honoraires de Belgique, Espagne, Suède, Allemagne, Finlande (à confirmer) et Italie qui ne sont pas investis des pouvoirs de délivrer des visas.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2015-2016

Il n'y a pas d'état "Schengen" représenté aux Iles Salomon avec pouvoirs de délivrance de visa. A Vanuatu, l'Ambassade de France est la seule habilitée à délivrer des visas Schengen. Il n'y a donc pas de réunions LSC.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Compte tenu qu'un accord de "visa waiver" a été conclu tant avec les Iles Salomon qu'avec la République de Vanuatu et que cet accord a été rendu applicable par provision au 10 octobre 2016, le problème est considérablement simplifié.

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

Non applicable en raison du point 3.1.

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Non applicable en raison du point 3.1.

3.4 Echange d'informations

Pendant la période courant du 1^{er} avril 2016 au 10 octobre 2016 (date d'entrée en vigueur du "visa waiver agreement"), l'Ambassade de France à Port-Vila (Vanuatu) a délivré 20 visas "Schengen". Il n'y a pas eu de cas de fraude rapporté.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Non applicable

4. Défis

Non applicable

5. Divers

Non applicable.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN SOUTH AFRICA Draft Report – 2016 – 2017¹

1. Introduction

There are 19 out of the 26 Schengen members present in South Africa – Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania have diplomatic missions in the country and are invited to attend both Schengen and Consular Coordination meetings.

Ireland and the United Kingdom do not attend the Schengen Cooperation Group meetings.

The cities in South Africa receiving highest numbers of applications for Schengen visas Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. While most of the Schengen Members States issue visas at their Embassies in Pretoria, many also maintain Consulates in Johannesburg, which is a larger urban and economic centre.

Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands and Spain have a permanent consular presence and deal with issue visas in Cape Town, while 4 others (Visegrad countries) do it on a "part time" basis. Sweden has a permanent consular presence in Cape Town but does not issue visas from there. Switzerland also has a permanent consular presence and deals with visa issues in Cape Town.

Denmark has a Consul in Durban while many others have Honorary Consuls.

Local Schengen cooperation takes place in Pretoria, involving Gauteng based consuls.

Some Member States represented in South Africa cooperate with outsourcing companies in visa matters. The precise functions (and fees) contracted to external service providers vary from Member State to Member State.

On Schengen visa matters, agreements regarding those countries not represented are as follows:

Italy represents Malta, Sweden represents Estonia, Denmark represents Iceland, Hungary represents Latvia, Switzerland represents Lichtenstein, Belgium represents Luxembourg, and Germany represents Slovenia

The European community in South Africa is relatively large and count for approximately 3725.000 people registered. It remains challenging to determine the exact amount of expatriates as not everybody register with their respective Embassies. Many EU nationals in SA have dual citizenship –South Africa and European.

2. LSC meetings held from April 2016 to March 2017

From April 2016 to March 2017 the Local Schengen Coordination (LSC) group met twice. The meetings on 15 June 2016 and 9 December 2016 combined the Consular- and Schengen Group meetings (back to back but with different participation) in order to accommodate agenda items for both groups before the holiday period.

During this report period the LSC meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation also prepared, drafted and distributed all relevant documents. The EU Delegation also liaised with the South African authorities in preparation and follow up of all the meetings.

¹April 2016 – March 2017

The LSC Group meetings discussed issues of relevance to consular work in South Africa. These included amongst others the outcome of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation Diplomatic Immunities Workshop for Foreign Missions hosted on 30 November 2016, issues related to dual citizenship, discussion and redrafting of the "List of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in South Africa for short stay visas in Schengen countries", exchanges on experiences with VSA Global in Schengen visa matters, role of MS consular teams in South Africa regarding visa requests from neighbouring countries where no consular representation exists on the ground, among others.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Member States are implementing the Visa Code in compliance with instructions from their respective headquarters. Exchanges in the group hinted that there is no significant visa-shopping practice in South Africa as all the Schengen countries seem to be well harmonised.

The LSG provided the opportunity for the Member States exchange information on practices regarding visa regulations and the fees applied in local currency, use of external service providers, capturing of biometric data for visa applicants, issues related to fraud, fake documentation, challenges in obtaining official documents e.g. unabridged birth certificates issued by South African competent authority, and to discuss issues regarding specifics of South African requirements on travel documents and residence permits, among others.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The information sheet submitted was reviewed and revised by the LSC group in line with comments received from the Visa Committee on 28 October 2016 and submitted to the Visa Committee in Brussels on 14 December 2016. The document was again revised on 7 April incorporating the comments received from the Visa Committee on 17 March 2017.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EU Delegation disseminated the important information and relevant guidelines issued from Brussels.

Locally, statistics are gathered on regular basis, and the EU Delegation facilitates the sharing of this information. These include Consular Emergency Coordination, Consular Dossier, Visa Statistics and the collection of Worldwide Statistics on Consular Assistance given to unrepresented EU Citizens in Third Countries.

4. Challenges

The implementation of the latest South African Immigration Law that come into effect on 1 June 2015 and the subsequent new amendments to the Immigration Act continue to pose challenges particularly regarding the different practices by the South Africa authorities at border posts regarding the list of necessary documentation or even the different practises by SA foreign missions processing visas abroad.

The implementation of this law, however, didn't facilitate the issuance of unabridged birth certificates to children born in South Africa applying for Schengen visas – a document needed for the abstention of Schengen visa.

The implementation of the SA regulations remains a key issue and one that will be re-visited with the South African authorities on a regular basis.

Following up on previous exchanges regarding South Africa Department of Home Affairs requests for exchanges on forensics, the EU delegation pursued the matter forwarded. Several Member States volunteer to offer such exchanges but to the date the SA DHA has not responded.

Member States are committed to continue the dialogue with the national authorities on issues that affect the issuance of Schengen visas and the LSC is continued to be perceived as a good platforms to do so.

Challenges and progress are reported and discussed at HoMs meetings, who are kept regularly informed on the work of both the LSC and LCC meetings. The inverse also happens and the Groups are kept informed on the policy dialogues with SA authorities particularly regarding visa and migration matters.

5. Other issues

The report has been agreed with the Member States and includes the inputs received.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN SRI LANKA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

There are 5 Schengen diplomatic missions in Colombo (FR,DE,IT,NO,CH) all of which provide representation for both Sri Lanka and the Maldives and they all process their own visa applications and on behalf of other Schengen Member States as well. All five missions make use of the services of an external service provider VFS Global Lanka Pvt Ltd for the collection of applications. VFS has a "Joint Schengen Visa Application Centre" in Colombo and a common visa collection service in Jaffna, which is currently being used by the missions of DE and CH.

<i>Mission</i>	<i>FR</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>IT</i>	<i>NO</i>	<i>CH</i>
<i>Members States</i>	<i>FR, ES,PT, CZ,</i>	<i>DE,AT, HU,EE,LV</i>	<i>IT, MT,SL</i>	<i>NO,SE, DK,FI,IS, LT</i>	<i>CH, NL,BE,LU, PL,SI</i>
<i>Service Provider</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>				

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Two LSC meetings were held (18 August 2016 and 14 February 2017) in the EU Delegation premises in Colombo during this reporting period (1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017). UK and RO were invited to attend as observers like in the previous years. The EU Delegation's main role in the LSC has been, to Chair these meetings, facilitate the discussions and draft and distribute the minutes and provide any other support requested by the Missions. The cooperation from and among the Missions is extremely good and all LSC activities and tasks are carried out on a burden-sharing basis. These meetings are well attended.. All LSC meetings are held in the capital but issues related to other cities are also discussed at the regular LSC meetings. All LSC members share this common Annual Report with their headquarters.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Schengen missions in Colombo are fully implementing the visa code and are ensuring the smooth running of tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code. The Missions

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

confirmed that the support documents they were requesting from the applicants corresponded to the harmonized list.

Some mission said during the August 2016 meeting that they were continuing to stamp the passports while others said they were not. The EU verified this and informed the missions that according to article 20(3) of the Visa Code concerning placing of stamps in the applicants travel documents has become obsolete.

As in the previous years, visa shopping was a frequent happening but the officers confirmed that thanks to the Visa Verification System which was fully operational they were able to detect these attempts and take the necessary action.

The Visa officers also confirmed that the finger printing process was also working well. The Visa Officers confirmed that only those persons who have been invited by a government to visit their countries were not requested to deposit their finger prints.

With regard to the duration of official visas issued on official passports, some missions said that they gave long term visas even upto 5 years especially for the Head of State and some senior officials in his delegation while other missions said that they issued official visas only for the specific duration of the official visit.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Schengen missions in Sri Lanka have confirmed that they are all using the harmonized list of supporting documents.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

So far, no attempts have been made by the missions to harmonise visa-issuing practices such as issuing long term visa's etc.

3.4 Exchange of information

Schengen missions continue to exchange information on the following:

Statistics

Schengen missions continued to compile and share visa statistics which were used during LSC meetings to discuss visa trends etc. It was noted during early 2017 that there was a considerable increase in visa requests which ranged from 20 to 50 % increase compared to the same period last year.

Cases of fraud

Cases of fraud are discussed in general terms and advice is sought from among the LSC colleagues on how these issues are address by them

Service providers

Schengen missions continued to exchange information on their experiences with the common service provider the VFS Global Lanka Pvt Ltd which continued to run the dedicated "Joint Schengen Visa Application Centre".

List of contacts

A list of relevant contacts for visa matters were regularly updated by the Schengen missions and this is posted in the Delegation website

Data sharing

Schengen missions continued to consult each other and exchanged information on issues regarding individual applications when required during this reporting period.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The Mission agreed that when forged documents were presented with the seal of the Foreign Ministry, they would send a Note verbale to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informing them about each of these specific cases.

4. Challenges

Identifying the genuineness of some of the visa requests and documentation continued to be the challenge during this reporting period, however to a large extent the missions were able to mitigate such risks by close consultation and coordinating with each other during the LSC meetings and also bilaterally. The fully functioning of the Visa Verification System also helped to mitigate some of these problems.

5. Other issues

None



1st May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Thailand
2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In 2016-2017, the number of EU Member States and Schengen Associated States remained unchanged in Thailand. In total, there were nineteen Schengen embassies represented in Bangkok, namely Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), The Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Slovakia (SK), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and Switzerland (CH). Visas are issued by FI on behalf of Estonia, by DE for Lithuania, by HU on behalf of Latvia, by AT on behalf of Malta and Slovenia. Romania (RO) is invited to the LSC meetings as observer, but does not take part in decision making of the LSC.

As mentioned in previous reports, a growing number of Schengen embassies have had to outsource their visa application processing services to private companies in order to cope with the increasing number of visa applications. Currently VFS Global processes visa applications for Austria (AT), Belgium (BE) (since 28.11.2016), Denmark (DK), Finland (FI), Italy (IT), The Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Spain (ES) and Sweden (SE) while TLS Contact manages for France (FR) and Switzerland (CH).

The EU Delegation to Thailand coordinates the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings in Thailand and is responsible for preparing the agenda and minutes. EU Member States and Schengen Associated States are invited to provide input for the upcoming meetings' agendas.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

LSC meetings have been held at regular intervals at the premises of the EU Delegation in Bangkok. During the 2016-2017 reporting period, a total of seven LSC meetings have been held, on 29 February 2016, 27 April 2016, 19 May 2016, 28 July, 6 October 2016, 21 December 2016 and 21 March 2017. Most meetings were well attended. The meetings are chaired by EUDEL. Reports of the meetings are drawn up by EU Delegation and shared with EU Member States and Associated Schengen States and with Headquarters.

Several MS share the common report with their capitals, adding their own comments. A few MS do not share any reports with the capitals. There is no co-ordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital as those locations deal solely with consular cases.

¹ March 2016 – March 2017

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code is applied according to the regulations. No major deficiencies or problems were noted.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

There are two points outstanding before the list of supporting documents can be harmonized. These concern the requirement of translating supportive documents and the requirement of providing complementary information of travel behaviour to what is shown in VIS. The two points have been thoroughly discussed at several LSC meetings. The last draft lists was agreed upon and forwarded to headquarters on 15 December 2016.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

There have been discussions on harmonising the issuing of long-validity MEVs. These discussions are ongoing. The validity of MEV varies from 1 to 4 year, with most long term MEVs being issued for a 1 year term.

3.4 Exchange of information

Information regarding statistics is exchanged between the EU member states via email and discussed during the meetings. The EU delegation compiles the data and circulates yearly statistics among the EU Member states. The table prepared by DG HOME, which asks for statistical information on visas A, C and LTV is used.

EU Member States exchange information regarding fraud cases.

EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have a common list of travel and health insurance companies and new applications are accepted twice a year. There are currently around 50 companies on the list. There have been no reports from insurance takers of misconducting travel insurance companies to the EUMS or EUDEL during 2016-2017.

One EUMS brought the attention to the fact that most travel insurances companies reimburse their clients only upon return to Thailand. However, the Handbook for the organisation of visa sections and local Schengen cooperation (H2, Part II, point 2.3) states that, if the insurance only covers a posteriori reimbursement, this could call into question the objective of the requirement of an insurance. The LSC group has thus decided to send a kind reminder to the insurance companies to encourage them to adapt their offer.

The Visa Information System is fully implemented and works well.

Few MS to use VIS mail, and those who do often find it necessary to call the recipient and notify that a VIS-mail had been sent. MS agree that the purpose to ensure safe communication is very important, but find VISmail to be difficult to use.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

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4. Challenges

The main challenge faced by the LSC group concerns the creation of the harmonised list of supporting documents for short stay visas. The work with this list will continue.

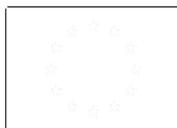
5. Other issues

EUDEL met with business representative

A business representative contacted EUDEL to inquire about the possibilities and developments of Thai visa waiver negotiations. He represented several major Asian companies (e.g.. King Power, Air Asia, Central Pattana). The representative's main message was that if Thai citizens would be granted a visa waiver, Thai private companies would increase their investments in Europe and Thai tourism in Europe would increase. EUDEL informed that a potential review of the visa list would need to be initiated through an official request from Thai authorities, rather than from private companies.

Asylum seekers and refugees visiting the Embassies

Several MS have been approached by asylum seekers and refugees with requests to apply for asylum, be part of resettlement programmes or receive funding from MS. One MS received more than 800 asylum requests in 2016. Other MS have not received any requests/applications at all. The groups that request to apply for asylum are mainly Christians from Pakistani or Buddhist monks from Bangladesh. Some have been granted refugee status by the UNHCR. All MS have informed the applicants that it is not possible to apply for asylum at the embassies.



Lomé, 8 juin 2017

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) TOGO RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

Seul la France et l'Allemagne sont représentées par une mission diplomatique et un consulat au Togo. Une partie des EMs sont accrédités au Togo sans représentation sur place au-delà des Consuls honoraires. Outre des demandes pour se rendre sur son territoire, la France traite les demandes de visas Schengen pour les pays suivants : AT, BE, CZ, EL, ES, LT, HU, NL, PT, SL, SE et CH. L'Allemagne traite, outre les demandes pour se rendre sur son territoire, celles pour se rendre en MT. De ce fait, le nombre de demandes de visas traitées annuellement par les deux consulats est très différent (environ 7.000 pour FR et 1.000 pour DE).

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2016-2017

A l'invitation de la Délégation de l'UE (DUE), une réunion formelle LSC a eu lieu à la DUE le 09/02/17. Les participants ont été les consuls FR et DE (ainsi que des collaborateurs à eux), personnel de la DUE et le Regional Schengen Coordinator pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest, basé à Accra. La DUE a présidé la réunion et a fait un projet de rapport, adopté par les EMs. La réunion suivante a eu lieu le 08/06/17.

Outre cette réunion, des contacts ad hoc ont eu lieu entre la DUE et les services consulaires FR et DE pour traiter de cas concrets au long de la période.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

La présence de seulement deux sections consulaires des EMs et la différence décrite ci-dessus dans le nombre d'autres EMs pour lesquels elles délivrent de visas est un élément de contexte important. Dans la période couverte, la coordination consulaire locale au titre de Schengen a été centrée sur le renforcement de la communication entre les deux sections consulaires, soumises à une charge de travail important. L'arrivée en 2016 d'un Regional Schengen Coordinator, basé à Accra mais couvrant le Togo, a eu un impact positif, avec deux missions au Togo pendant la période couverte.

¹ Avril 2016 – Mars 2017

3.2 Estimation du besoin d'harmonisation de la liste des documents justificatifs.

L'harmonisation est en cours

3.3 Harmonisation des procédures

Les sections consulaires de deux Etats membres suivent de procédures différentes concernant la prise de rendez-vous pour le dépôt de dossiers (demande au préalable). Tous les deux consulats font des entretiens aux demandeurs et ont des procédures rapides pour des VIPs et des diplomates.

La durée de validité des visas à entrées multiples varie de 1an à 4 ans. Tous les deux consulats délivrent des MEVs à des conjoint(e)s togolais(es).

3.4 Echange d'informations

Les services consulaires des deux EMs présents échangent directement cas par cas, notamment concernant les raisons de refus de visa. Des statistiques ont été échangées en février 2017 et il a été convenu de régulariser cet échange de statistiques.

La réunion de coordination consulaire de février 2017 a été l'occasion pour échanger des informations et des procédures sur les risques liés aux cas de fraude, assurances médicales de voyage et les informations bancaires fournies par des demandeurs de visa. Il a été convenu que, lors des prochaines réunions LSC, il y aurait des échanges sur des « éléments à risque » (blacklists).

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

None

4. Défis

Lors du prochain exercice 2017-18, les défis seraient de consolider et de rendre plus automatiques les échanges d'information ainsi que l'avancement dans l'harmonisation de procédures.

5. Divers

None



UNION EUROPEENNE
DELEGATION EN TUNISIE

24 June 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TUNISIA
2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

15 EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) deliver Schengen visas out of the 18 Member States present in Tunisia (the other three being Bulgaria, Romania and United Kingdom). One non-EU Member State also delivers Schengen visas (Switzerland).

5 Member States hold representation agreements in relation to visas: Austria represents Slovenia; Belgium represents Luxembourg; Switzerland represents Slovakia; Germany represents Lithuania and Latvia; and Finland represents Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and Norway. Finland also represented Sweden before its embassy was reopened in 2016, however continues to issue Schengen visas for them.

Certain Member States also issue visas for Libyan nationals as an exceptional measure taking into account the closure of their Embassies in Tripoli.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Within the timeframe of this report, two meetings were held during 2016 and one in 2017. All the meetings were very well attended by Member States. They were chaired by the Political Section of the EUD. EUD drafted reports after each meeting and circulated them to the Member States for comments and to be transmitted to their capitals.

The meeting held on 11 October 2016 was organized in the margins of the Sub-Committee on Migration and Social Affairs and the negotiations on visa facilitation and readmissions between the EU and Tunisia taking advantage of DG NEAR present in Tunisia. The second meeting was held on 17 November 2016. The 14 February 2017 meeting was solely dedicated to discuss the harmonised list of supporting documents. There is no coordination with the LSC in other locations besides Tunis as the consulates are only located at the capital.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

11 Member States have started using the services of an external service provider to handle visa applications. 6 Member States highlighted that they collect biometric data.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

The Member States face an increase in fraudulent visa requests. They use additional resources to scan and detect visa requests supported by false documentation. They share information about fraudulent cases and best practices to counter such cases to avoid reoccurring fraud schemes.

The Member States have difficulties in issuing visas within the 15 day period as some consulates have limited resources.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The Member States are open to the elaboration of a harmonized list of supporting documents. A first draft was prepared in 2014 and presented to the Visa Committee but an Implementing Decision was not reached. In 2016 during the 11 October LSC meeting the issue was raised again and a Member State took the initiative to elaborate a new draft list. The draft list was presented to Member States during the LSC meeting on 17 November where it was discussed in detail. The following LSC meeting on 14 February 2017 was solely dedicated to discuss the draft list. A new version which includes the comments made by Member States is being elaborated.

Work is on-going and further discussions are needed to achieve a harmonized list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No other initiatives on harmonisation of practices have been elaborated; however the Member States are open for new harmonization propositions on Schengen visas on the basis of Art. 48.1 of the Visa Code.

The Member States only issue multiple entry visas (MEVs) for periods of 1 to 2, 3 or 4 years. 5 year MEVs are not issued as the Tunisian passport only has a validity for a maximum 5 years.

3.4 Exchange of information

Information exchange is done through email or through LSC meetings. Statistics are also circulated by email or shared during tours de table in LSC meetings. The Member States also share cases of fraud and exchange information on travel medical insurances during LSC meetings.

All Schengen consulates should have access to the Visa Information System (VIS) as it is considered an integral part of the vetting process. VisMail is still being rolled out and not fully operational. One Schengen member uses VisMail internally while another Member State tried to use VisMail but encountered technical difficulties which they are trying to resolve.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The negotiations of a visa facilitation agreement are ongoing. Issues subject to facilitation are: list of documented evidence justifying voyage; reduction of visa fees for certain categories; facilitation of the possibility of obtaining long-term multiple entry visas (5 years for certain

categories); a reduction to 10 calendar days of the visa request procedure; and exempt holders of diplomatic/official passports of requiring a visa.

During the Heads of Mission (HoMs) meeting on 9 December 2016, the Head of Delegation informed the EU HoMs on the Youth Partnership, an initiative launched by the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and Tunisian President Béji Caïd Essebsi on 1 December 2016 in Brussels. The Youth Partnership encompasses initiatives and programmes regarding employment, professional training, mobility, culture and research that support Tunisian youth. In particular, the Youth Partnership increases the ERASMUS + scholarships to 1500 per year starting in 2017. The issue of increasing cooperation in visa issuing to ERASMUS + students was included in the agenda of the 14 February 2017 LSC meeting, however, has been postponed for the next meeting.

4. Challenges

The challenges highlighted in the latest LSC report (2013-2014) were:

- **Fraud:** The Member States exchange information on fraud cases and best practices to avoid fraudulent visa requests and the presentation of false documents.
- **Visa shopping:** the harmonized list of supporting documents would decrease "visa shopping."

Issues to be addressed within the next reporting period are:

- Request of proof of financial means (most local credit cards are not supported outside Tunisia);
- The difference of documents requested for visa and those the traveller needs to present to the border police;
- Issuing Schengen visas to Libyans living in Tunisia;
- Issuing of visas to ERASMUS+ for students;
- Fraud cases and detection of false documentation.

5. Other issues

This report has been prepared by the EU Delegation in Tunisia and approved by the Schengen Member States represented in Tunisia.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION TURKEY 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The reporting period of this report relates to the period from April 2016 until March 2017 and covers all locations in Turkey where Schengen countries issue visas, namely Ankara, Istanbul, Edirne and Izmir.² The representation of Schengen states remained the same.³ All MS States except Slovakia are outsourcing their visa application service.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings were well attended. On average attendance of the Schengen countries was as follows:

- **In general:** 88,50%
- **In Ankara:** 87,00%
- **In Istanbul:** 90,00%

The participation of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia is not included in these statistics. However, all three countries always were invited and frequently participated. Ireland and the United Kingdom were also invited to attend the meetings as observers.

In the reporting period 13 regular LSC meetings were held: seven in Ankara and six in Istanbul.

- 11th April 2016, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 18th April 2016, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 13th June 2016, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 15th June 2016, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 6th September 2016, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 7th September 2016, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 17th October 2016, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 20th October 2016, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 29th November 2016, LSC in Ankara;
- 6th December 2016, LSC meeting in Istanbul;

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² Turkish citizens also have the possibility to apply for a visa in Bursa, Gaziantep and Antalya for Italy and Germany at an ESP.

³ **In Ankara:** Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland (totally 23 Schengen countries).

In Istanbul: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Sweden, and Switzerland. Finland is represented by a honorary consul, a Finnish citizen tasked to collect visa applications and to participate in LSC. (Totally 17 Schengen countries).

In Izmir: Germany, Greece and Italy (3).

In Edirne: Greece (and Bulgaria).

- 24th January 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 6th February 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 27th March 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;

The EUD included Edirne and Izmir MS representations (General Consulates) in the LSC mailing list and shared the minutes of LSC meetings and the statistics with all Schengen consulate locations in Turkey. Schengen States consulate staff in other locations was free to participate in the LSC meetings organized in Ankara and Istanbul.

Reports/minutes were drawn up by the EUD. The MS have been encouraged to share the LSC meeting minutes with their central authorities.

Meetings were chaired by the EUD. Slovakia was representing the LCC members as part of the rotating Presidency of the Council in the second semester of 2016. As Malta, which is presiding the Council in the first semester of 2017, does not have a representation in Ankara, Slovakia offered to continue its representation function for the first semester of 2017 in a constructive approach.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code – April 2016-March 2017

Given the number of visas issued and the geopolitical importance of the EU-Turkey relations, the LSC is considered an important platform for the exchange of information and experiences enabling Member States to ensure a harmonised approach when it comes to visa issuance.

On several occasions, during discussions among the MS it became apparent that there are some potentially divergent practices in respect of the implementation of the EU-Visa Code and the Handbook for the processing of visa applications and the modification of issued visas. These discrepancies mostly relate to the issuance of multiple-entry visas and the determination of bona fide applicants, with the practice of several Embassies/Consulates to sign local “facilitation” agreements with chambers of commerce and similar structures. Therefore, the EUD offered to conduct a study – “LSC-Turkey 2014” – to highlight the discrepancies in terms of a harmonised approach towards implementing the Visa code.

The study was finalised and forwarded within the hierarchy for approval to publish.

It is not clear yet in what format or forum the Study will be published.

3.2 Assessment of the need for common VFS audits and a common approach on issuing multiple entry visas

After several discussions and assessments, the need for common VFS audits as well as a common approach on issuing multiple entry visas has been addressed by the EUD. For these purposes, two working groups have been installed and met on 20 January 2017.

The MS have expressed their general interest to adapt and participate in the common VFS audits. Denmark, Lithuania and Slovenia would be ok with someone else assessing on their behalf.

Greece expressed the concern that its ministry will not recognize the auditing of other countries.

For each visit at least two MS should be designated to audit. There are 9 VFS locations in total. Two visits per location each year are foreseen. Meeting will follow and the first audits will be conducted soon.

Concerning the common approach to issuing multiple entry visas to Turkish nationals, the working group should work on harmonizing the existing practices which are at the two ends of the spectrum at the moment. DG Home supports these endeavours.

3.3. *Exchange of information*

Monthly statistics have been collected by each MS consulate/embassy location. There are comprehensive monthly statistics since 2010, allowing the EUD and the MS to carry out monthly and yearly comparisons and analyses at the local level.

Several information requests have been circulated among the LSC, aiming at better coordination and harmonization of practices. Information on fraudulent visa requests has also been regularly shared with the aim of preventing illegal migration.

A regular information exchange on different methods of handling visa requests from Syrian nationals at MS' embassies in Turkey took place within the LSC platform, including the exchange of statistics relating to both visa and asylum requests by Syrian nationals.

Besides taking notice of Member States bilateral resettlement programs for Syrian refugees, LSC regularly addressed several aspects of the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the Schengen visa practice in Turkey, notably on:

- i) how family reunion is being interpreted and applied in “Syrian cases”;
- ii) in what circumstances Member States are resorting to “visas with limited territorial validity” in this context;
- iii) how to assess documents presented by Syrian nationals in support of their visa requests;
- iv) the impact of “usurpation of identity documents” in the assessment of a Syrian visa request.

3.4 *Other initiatives taken within the LSC framework*

Public outreach meetings as were organised in the previous years were cancelled due to decrease in interest and, to a minor degree, because of security concerns. These meetings aimed to present and explain the Schengen visa system to a wider public and, particularly, to businessmen, associations and local chambers of commerce in different locations throughout Turkey.

- LSC has been following the developments of the Visa Liberalization Dialogue (VLD) between Turkey and the EU and the adoption of the Readmission Agreement. Several colleagues of the LSC group also attended the meetings and de-briefing sessions organised during the VLD expert missions.

Other relevant news regarding VFS is the determination of the contract between the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the company VFS for Visa externalization services as of 16 December. From 17 December on the new contract with the company BLS International entered into effect.

Furthermore, Latvia has announced its cooperation with VFS. The Embassy of the Czech Republic in Ankara and the Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Istanbul announced

the cooperation with the VFS GLOBAL Company for handling visa applications. VFS GLOBAL Visa Application Centres opened in Ankara and Istanbul on 29 September 2016. This service is available for Turkish residents and other country nationals legally residing in Turkey who wish to apply for a Schengen visa to the Czech Republic.

EUD organised five Document Security Training sessions in order to train Visa staff in the Embassies on different aspects of document controlling especially in the light of the current high influx of refugees into Turkey and the EU-Turkey Agreement. The trainings took part at EUD and were conducted by the German and Austrian Document advisers attached to their Embassy's in Ankara, Mr. Dirk Stagge, Mr. Gerhard Bogner and Mr. Florian Stassl.

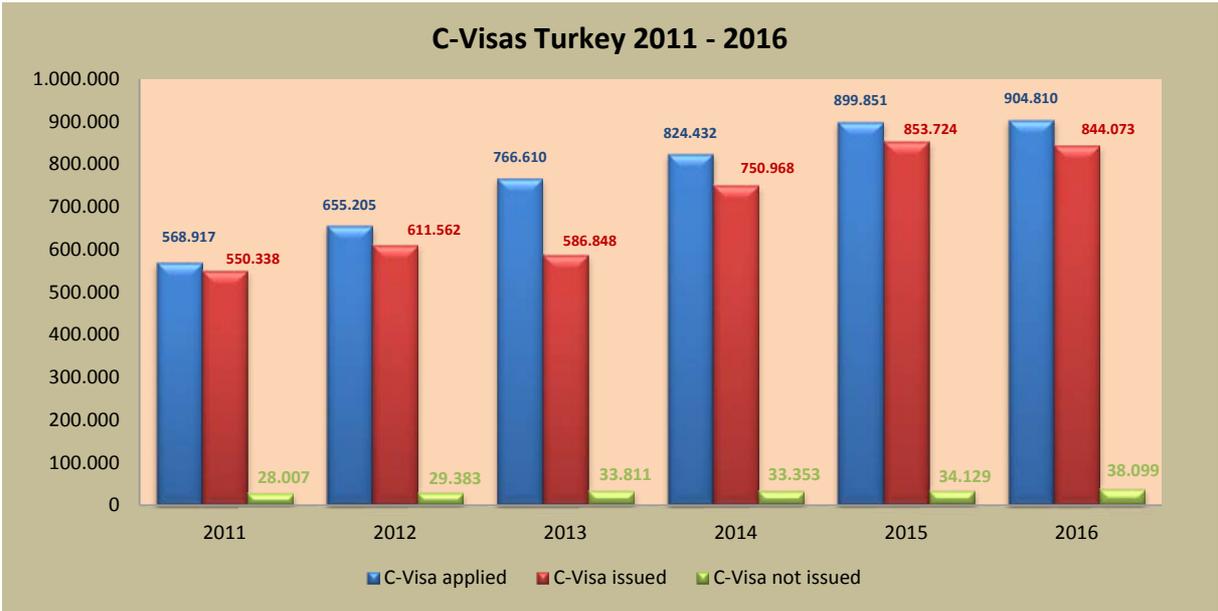
They raised awareness of the circulation of fake Syrian passports and stolen Iraqi passports and pointed out specific features to look for in order to identify accuracy of the documents. Additionally, the events served as networking grounds as present Visa staff could discuss different national approaches and cases as well. The overall reception of these trainings was very positive and participants asked for more of these formats so that more staff can participate and learn in the near future.

In total 120 staff were trained at five sessions:

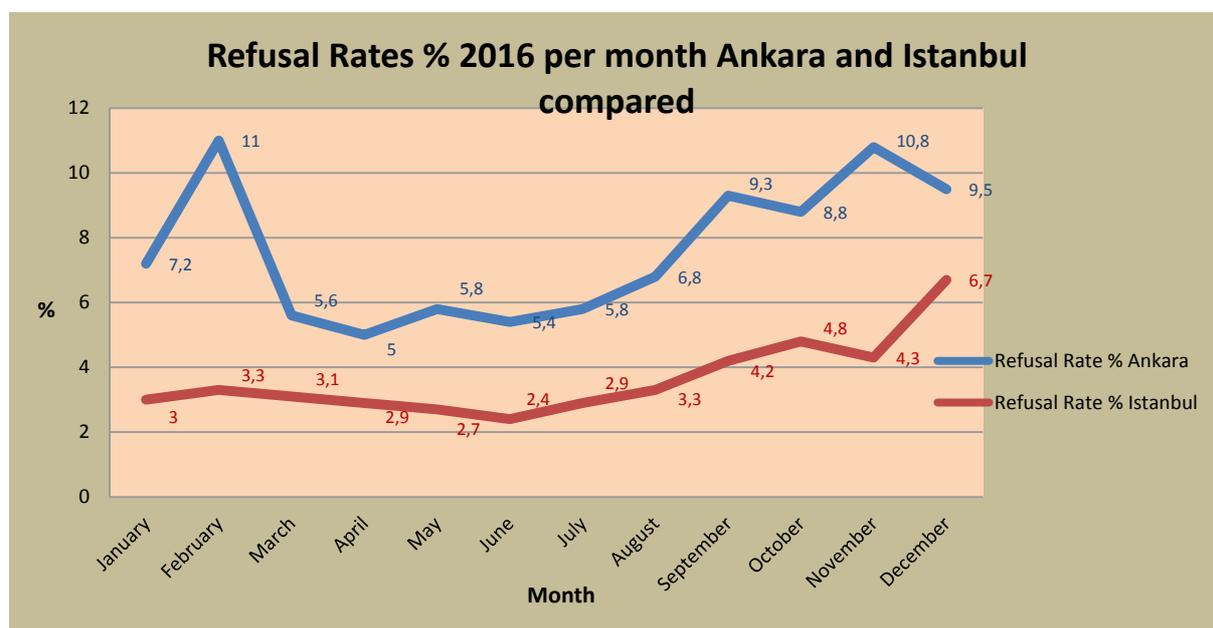
- 08.11.2016
- 24.11.2016
- 08.12.2016
- 25.01.2017
- 15.02.2017

3.5 Miscellaneous

After the happenings of the 15th of July (Coup Attempt) the LSC network expected a significant increase of VISA applications and refusal rates. The number of C-Visas applied for has increased, but in such a number that no relation can be seen to the mentioned happening. The numbers are within the usual increase rate of the past years.



The refusal rates increased a bit, what is against the trend of the past years. We could monitor a decreasing number of refusals since 2011. Although some MS report a raise of the refusal rate of 30%, the total figures remain within the trend.



The network will monitor this development closely.

4. Challenges in 2017-2018

An increase in emigration intentions of higher educated Turkish families to EU MS was monitored after the coup attempt. Due to the political development in the country it can be forecasted that this phenomenon will not stop in the near future. The network will closely monitor the developments in this direction. On this matter, all countries reported a general increase in refusal rates of visa applications in 2016, especially regarding applications in the South East. This is also related to the rising number of asylum seekers in this part of Turkey. Especially in the summer the refusals went up, though there was no direct relation to be made to the coup d'état attempt of 15 July. In general, anything under 10% of refusal for the whole country is acceptable.

Quarterly Development Istanbul			
	applied	rejected	rejected %
Q1	149540	4652	3.11
Q2	183075	4804	2.62
Q3	136607	4738	3.47
Q4	126160	6654	5.27

Quarterly Development Ankara			
	applied	refused	refused %
Q1	43798	3414	7.8
Q2	51385	2747	5.35
Q3	39824	2898	7.28
Q4	44783	4333	9.68

The Initiatives "common approach on issuing long-term VISA" and "Common VFS audits" were just started and EUD will work closely with the MS in order to come to a common conclusion regarding the future approach towards this topics.

The LSC in Turkey will continue the harmonization work within the framework of the EU Visa Code. The approach of the Turkish public administration towards the Schengen Visa Regime remains critical especially given the ongoing visa liberalization dialogue and the entry into force of the Readmission Agreement.

The LSC will closely follow the VLD process, till the Visa Liberalization will be finally decided.

The same applies to the general perception by the Turkish public of the system, which requires LSC to devote resources for public diplomacy purposes, possibly through a systematic campaign directed at target groups, including pro-active, public information sessions with businessmen and advertisements in the media.



15/05/2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN UKRAINE 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Present in Kyiv: Republic of Austria, *Republic of Bulgaria*, Kingdom of Belgium, *Republic of Croatia*, *Republic of Cyprus*, Czech Republic, Kingdom of Denmark, Republic of Estonia, Republic of Finland, French Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Hellenic Republic, Hungary, Republic of Italy, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Lithuania, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Kingdom of Norway, Republic of Poland, Portuguese Republic, *Romania*, Republic of Slovakia, Republic of Slovenia, Kingdom of Spain, Kingdom of Sweden, Swiss Confederation, *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*.

Representation from Prague: *Ireland*, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

Representation from Helsinki: Republic of Iceland

Representation from Warsaw: Republic of Malta

Visa Application Centres are run by:

- **VFS GLOBAL** for the following Schengen countries: Republic of Austria, Republic of Croatia, Czech Republic, Kingdom of Denmark, Republic of Estonia, Republic of Finland, French Republic, Federal Republic of Germany, Hellenic Republic, Hungary, Republic of Lithuania, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Kingdom of Norway, Republic of Poland, Republic of Slovenia, Kingdom of Sweden, Swiss Confederation;
- **Visa Management Service** for Republic of Italy;
- **BLS international** for Kingdom of Spain
- **Pony Express** for Republic of Latvia, Republic of Slovakia;
- **TLScontact** for Kingdom of Belgium, Swiss Confederation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

The **EU Delegation** is in charge of the coordination of regular LSC meetings.

- Number of regular meetings held during the reporting period: 10
- Meetings were well attended. Croatia and Romania join regularly the LSC meetings.
- Meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation.
- At some meetings relevant guest speakers are invited.
- Minutes of meetings are drawn up by the EU Delegation.
- Sharing common reports with capitals: YES.
- *Ad-hoc* meetings organised on specific subjects and with the participation of third parties:
 - An *ad-hoc* meeting of the Local Schengen Cooperation working group was held on 10 November 2016 to discuss consular matters resulting from the illegally annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and the situation in the non-government controlled areas of Eastern Ukraine. U.S. Embassy was invited.
 - Under the Slovak Presidency and back-to-back to the regular Local Schengen Cooperation meeting of November 2016, the EU Delegation hosted the first discussion on the preparation of the Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework. Subsequently the EU Delegation took over the coordination of this exercise.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

- Coordination with LSC in locations outside the capital is ensured through respective MS Embassies. Consulates located outside Kyiv report regularly on the issued Schengen visas.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Visa Code is applied by Member States in accordance with the national instructions.

LSC meetings are generally dedicated among others to the coordination and harmonization of existing practices, in particular the list of supporting documents, exchange of information on insurance companies and cooperation with commercial intermediaries (travel agencies).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonize the lists of supporting documents

As of 15 May 2014 a list of supporting documents is operational in Ukraine.

In practice the implementation of the list of supporting documents differs slightly among the individual LSC Members. At the same time, no individual complaints were formally conveyed by the Ukrainian citizens regarding the handling of Schengen applications by the LSC consulates, which is a positive development in the light of harmonized list implementation.

During the reporting period, the Polish Embassy suggested to amend the list of supporting documents by adding "shopping" as a reason of travel. Currently the discussion on the matter is stalled, as several Member States see no need of amending the list of supporting documents and consider that the "shopping" purpose could be accommodated within the existing tourist visa applications.

3.3 Exchange of information

Monthly statistics are shared within the LSC, and the EU Delegation processes the information provided by the MS consulates and reports back quarterly to the MS on this topic. The exchange of information within the LSC also covers implementation of the Visa Information System, cases of fraud, travel medical insurance, list of accredited travel agencies, and the procedure of their accreditation, handling various requests from the Ukrainian MFA etc.

During the reporting period, MS intensified their exchanges regarding the supporting documents issued by the illegal Russian authorities in the Crimean peninsula, as well as by the non-recognized entities in parts of Lugansk and Donetsk Oblasts under non-government control.

4. Challenges

The **illegal annexation** by Russia of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol in March 2014 and the overall security situation in the Eastern Ukraine continue to impact on the consular activity of the Schengen Member States, and add extra burden on their daily work. Member States (MS) report regularly within the LSC group, when they notice cases of applications from permanent residents of Crimea and Sevastopol holding foreign travel passports, issued after the illegal annexation. However, during the reporting period, the number of registrations of foreign travel documents issued elsewhere in the Russian Federation to permanent residents of Crimea has increased exponentially, thus making more difficult their tracking.

Another major challenge for the next reporting period is to apply a uniform policy towards the supporting documents issued by the non-recognized entities in the **non-Ukrainian controlled area in Donbas**. In February 2017, the Russian President signed an executive order recognizing civil documents (including passports, birth, marriage and death certificates,

school diplomas, vehicle registration etc.) issued by the so-called "Peoples' Republics" in the non-government controlled areas in Eastern Ukraine. These developments may require a substantial effort both locally and in HQs to update the non-recognition policy in light of new experiences on the ground.

The situation of **internally displaced people** and people affected by the conflict in the East of Ukraine remains difficult and MS monitor closely the migration patterns in Ukraine. In April 2017 the Ministry of Social Policy reported 1.6 million IDPs. The UN estimates that some 3.8 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, both in government and non-government controlled areas. Despite these high figures, intentions of Ukrainian citizens to enter the EU irregularly remain very low. Out of a total 1 236 325 asylum applications in the EU+ countries in 2016, only 12 426 originated from Ukraine (cf. EASO). At the moment, there are no indications that Ukraine's migration and asylum patterns will change significantly, once the visa liberalisation will be in place. The IDPs situation in Ukraine did not influence MSS' policies for issuing Schengen visas to Ukrainian applicants. In 2016 the Schengen visas refusal rate remained as low as 3.2% as compared to 6.9% world average.

During the reporting period the **Visa Facilitation Agreement** continued to be applied without any major setback, and the level of awareness within the LSC group regarding the forgery of supporting documents increased significantly. No major complaints regarding the length of procedures or access to the premises of consulates were voiced. The activity of external service providers unfolds in a highly professional manner.

Throughout the year, the LSC discussed the **possible impact of the visa liberalization** on the activity of MSS' visa sections. Some MS took already administrative measures regarding the staffing of their respective visa sections. A number of MS decided to decrease their staff, other will assign the existing staff to other tasks (e.g. processing of D visas), while a third group of MS will wait until the visa liberalization will be fully running, and impact on their workload could be better assessed.

The next LSC Report will aim, inter alia, to take stock of the trends in applications from permanent residents of Crimea and Sevastopol holders of Russian passports, issued after the illegal annexation. The use of supporting documents issued from so-called "Peoples' Republics" in the non-government controlled areas in Eastern Ukraine also needs to be closely monitored.

5. Other issues

On 20 April 2016, the European Commission proposed to the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament to lift visa requirements for the citizens of Ukraine holders of biometric passports, by transferring Ukraine to the list of countries whose citizens can travel without a visa to the Schengen area. The proposal came after the European Commission gave a positive assessment on 18 December 2015, confirming that Ukraine met all the benchmarks under the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. Subsequently the Council and the European Parliament reached an agreement on the proposal on 28 February 2017, and approved the visa waiver on 6 April (European Parliament) and 11 May (European Council) respectively. Visa liberalisation for Ukraine will eventually enter into force 20 days after the publication of the regulation in the Official Journal, thus granting Ukrainian citizens the right to travel without a visa to the EU for a period of stay of 90 days in any 180-day period.

Visas will however continue to be issued to the Ukrainian citizens holders of non-biometric passports. According to the State Migration Service, 9 960 280 passports without chip (old type) with 10 years validity were issued in Ukraine during 2007-2014. Between January 2015 and December 2016, additional 1 894 128 passports (new type without chip) with 10 years validity were issued. As of November 2016, Ukraine started issuing only biometric passports

with chip, gradually phasing out the non-biometric passports in circulation, at the time of their expiry. Ukrainian legislation allows Ukrainian citizens to hold two passports at the same time. Being aware of the political and economic importance of visa free travel to Ukraine, in 2016 the EU has devoted a significant budget for a 2-year long communication campaign on visa free and migration issues. The global objectives of the project are to enhance the communication activities in order to increase mobility and people-to-people contacts between the EU and Ukraine, to educate travellers about the new rules, to explain clearly their rights and obligations, and to describe benefits and opportunities visa free travel will bring to different target audiences (students, businesses, work migrant). The project also aims at fighting myths about the topic, and responding to the challenges of the visa free regime, which include aspects related to overstays, customs rules, irregular and illegal migration, crime, and others.

NB: The present Report has been approved by the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States.



April 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) – UNITED KINGDOM (LONDON) 2016-2017 REPORT

1. Introduction

As regards Member States and associated states' presence in the United Kingdom, the situation remains unchanged compared to the previous reporting period: All except for Iceland are present in London for the purpose of issuing visas. Fifteen Member States cooperate with an external service provider for the purpose of the collection of visa applications. Thirteen Member States are present in Edinburgh (eight only via an external service provider); nine Member States are present in Manchester (seven only via an external service provider); three Member States are present via an external service provider in Cardiff.

The total number of visa applications handled in the United Kingdom in 2016 was 241 533 which is an increase of 2.7 % compared to 2015 and of 23% compared to 2012.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Since the last reporting period three meetings have been held (chaired by COM (DG HOME) and meetings are generally very well attended. A representative of DG JUST participated in one of the meetings, mainly replying to operational questions regarding the implementation of the Directive. Reports are drawn up by DG HOME after each meeting but Member States could make better use of the operational conclusions drawn and COM's clarifications of implementation of the Visa Code and, in particular, the Directive [2004/38/EC](#) so as to avoid repetitive questions on the same subjects (see point 3.3).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

No major problems with the implementation the Visa Code has been noted, but questions are regularly raised regarding specific issues of implementation. One issue is frequently on the agenda: the interaction between Directive [2004/38/EC](#) on the free movement of family members of EU citizens on the agenda of each meeting.

3.2 Exchange of information

Thanks to the efforts of one Member State, the exchange of 'local' statistics has improved considerably but some Member States still omit to send their contribution timely. Member States have been encouraged to fulfil this requirement (provided by the Visa Code, Article 48 (3) (a)) so that information on fluctuations can be shared with the entire group.

Member States continue to exchange information on various operational subjects (e.g. cases of fraud) in the formal meetings and by e-mail.

DG HOME shares information from the relevant Council and Commission fora (Visa Working Party, Visa Committee etc.).

3.3 Other initiative taken in LSC

On the basis of 4 questions an informal survey was carried out of the efficiency of and the satisfaction with the LSC in London. Only ten Member States replied. Replies can be summarized as follows:

Despite harmonised rules, Member States' practices differ, in particular with regard to family members of EU citizens; central authorities could be more supportive on this matter. It was also noted that even if the LSC agrees on a practice to follow, not all MS follows it afterwards. MS should harmonise practices with regard to the issuing of multiple entry visas. More information should be given on the different UK residence permits, migration routes/risk (by representatives of the UK Home Office); thematic meetings on the detection of false, counterfeit and forged documents could be organised.

To improve efficiency a "catalogue" of the conclusions drawn in LSC in the period 2012-2016 has been drawn up and Member States have been invited to make this part of the "handover file" for new staff members for consultation before raising a subject in the meeting.

4. Challenges

Differing practices and considerable difference in number of applications (and the two are linked) with one Member State processing 40% of all visa applications, three other Member States each processing 10% and the remaining 21 Member States processing in total 30% of visa applications.



Washington, 16 June 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Washington, DC, USA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

All EU Member States are present in Washington, DC, as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. For the purpose of LSC in Washington, Estonia is represented by its sole consular post in the US located in New York City. Sweden issues Schengen visa in Washington DC for Iceland and Finland. Estonia issues Schengen visa in New York City for Latvia and Latvia issues Schengen visas in Washington D.C for Estonia. Liechtenstein is represented by Switzerland for LSC purposes.

Since US citizens do not need visas for short stays in the Schengen area, the issuance of Schengen visa is generally limited to third-country nationals legally staying in the US. Some consulates (Netherlands, as Regional Support Office², Estonia, Luxembourg³) also issue visas for third-country nationals residing outside the US), either due to non-representation in certain countries or following the centralisation of visa issuance in Washington D.C. as a regional support office.

So far the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden are using external service providers in the US (Finland and Iceland do too given their representation agreement with Sweden in Washington DC).

2. LSC meetings held in 2016—2017

Three meetings were held in April, September and December 2016, and were generally well attended. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and the reports were drawn up by the EU Delegation. One of the meetings was organized back-to-back with a consular cooperation meeting to maximize participation and co-chaired with the Slovak Presidency. This approach could be repeated if agreed with forthcoming Presidencies and relevant for Member States.

There is no systematic coordination of the Schengen cooperation outside of Washington DC, however, as part of the "out of the Beltway-local chairs" initiative, EU consulates across the US have an opportunity to exchange relevant information.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

One of the most active discussions took place, at the initiative of a member state, regarding the personal appearance for all visa applicants whose biometric data had already been

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

² The Netherlands Regional Support Office in Washington issues visa for visa requiring citizens based in all countries in the Western Hemisphere

³ Luxembourg issues visas in Washington DC for citizens based in Canada, Mexico, and, in exceptional cases, for some countries of Central and Latin America.

collected (and retained, i.e. during the last 59 months). Member States were asked (1) whether they were already treating visa applications in the same way, (2) if this was the case, whether it was done regardless of the fact that the traveller was known to their consulate, or not, and (3) whether the initial collection of biometric data allowing not to request personal appearance had to be submitted at their consulate, for such an exception to be made. It appeared that most Consulates required the personal appearance of the applicant, although exceptions were made. The point was also made in the discussion that requesting the personal appearance of a person to collect its biometric elements when those were already in the VIS was contrary to the objective of the VIS.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

MS have been implementing the supporting documents list approved on March 26th 2013, by the Commission Implementing Decision (C (2013) 1725 final) establishing the lists of supporting documents to be presented by visa applicants in Jordan, Kosovo and the United States of America (Atlanta, Bedford, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, San Juan, Tampa, Washington).

Member States continue to agree that there is no need to amend at this stage the list of supporting documents required for visa applications. However, clarity over insurance coverage requirements could be improved. It was noted, in that context, that US citizens travelling to the Schengen area without a visa were often travelling without insurance and that they represented the bulk of travellers to the EU originating from the US.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The collection of biometrics was discussed. Some member states explained that they required in advance a copy of previous visas to check in VIS whether biometric data had already been collected. In any event, the use of VIS should allow, when such data has already been collected, avoiding another collection of biometric data.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States exchanged on their experiences with regards to the outsourcing of visa applications to external service providers (ESPs), and shared their assessment of the average processing time of visas for business purposes. Most indicated that they were able to issue a visa within 2 days (unless a consultation mechanism had to be initiated), and that they generally asked applicants to apply two weeks before their trip, with a processing time averaging a week.

On the issue of insurance, Member States shared their practices with regards to their acceptance of certain sorts of insurance companies (costs prepaid in Europe vs high deductibles or advance by the traveller). Practices appeared to diverge.

Member States also exchanged on their experiences with the bi-annual review of the US VWP conducted by US authorities and on the possible changes to the conditions of the programme, as well as on their experiences with the US Global entry programme. They discussed the evolution of the number of applicants over the summer of 2016 and on the possible impact of the US State Department travel warning issued before the summer for Europe. Last but not

least, US citizens who were aware of the EU visa reciprocity mechanism deadline of 12 April 2016 reached out to EU consulates in the US to ask about the need to request a visa to come to the EU if the EU was to re-establish visas for US citizens.

4. Challenges

Washington LSC has reached cruising speed. Over the last year, the exchange of information remains the area where the group has provided the biggest added value. The designation of "Local Chairs" representing the EU has improved LSC coordination outside Washington DC, and could help in ensuring a more systematic flow of information from the Washington LSC to the rest of the US, and vice-versa. At this stage though, Local Schengen coordination has not been among the main priorities of the coordination undertaken with local chairs. The frequency of LSC meetings in DC could be reduced to once per semester, unless urgent needs emerge.

5. Other issues

This report was endorsed by all Member States present in Washington DC.



15 May 2017

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in VENEZUELA 2016-2017 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Nine Members States (MS) represented in Caracas issue Schengen visas: Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain.

Some of these countries issue C visas on behalf of other countries that are not represented in Caracas.

Various MS consulates in Caracas have jurisdiction over other Caribbean islands and countries.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Bearing in mind that work to harmonise the requirements and procedures for Schengen visa applications was completed in 2014, Schengen cooperation topics were addressed in all of the quarterly consular coordination meetings. In addition, the MS met regularly to discuss specific issues.

The consular coordination meetings were chaired by the Netherlands from mid-2015 until the end of 2016. Poland currently holds the chair. Consular representatives from other cities and representatives of MS that do not have a mission in Venezuela also usually attended these meetings, but developments in the situation have made it increasingly difficult for them to travel.

3. Current situation

Due to developments in the country's political, economic and social situation, most of the MS have witnessed a very significant increase in consular needs and services, both as regards applications for Schengen visas and for EU passports by binational citizens.

There has been much discussion on 'waves' of applications by certain nationalities for a visa at one or more specific consulates.

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

During the meetings, the MS exchange information on practices regarding particular aspects of the Visa Code and on specific problems that have arisen.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the list of supporting documents

The COCON comments were received in 2016, and all MS have agreed to apply them.

3.3 Harmonising practices

A new Dicom exchange rate was introduced in Venezuela in March 2016, inter alia for diplomatic missions. In addition to this rate, a (much lower) Dipro rate was established. However, it is limited to goods and services not including consular services, to which the Dicom rate applies.

The MS had to make gradual adjustments to the prices of consular services until the use of the same exchange rate was harmonised at the end of April 2017.

There are still minor differences between the prices, as the consulates did not adapt their prices to the official daily Dicom rate at the same time.

Use of the new Dicom exchange rate meant that the costs of visas in bolívares rose considerably for Venezuelans. Furthermore, the security problems, the huge inflation rate in 2016 and the most recent shortage of cash in Venezuela mean that it is becoming more difficult from one day to the next for Venezuelans to pay in cash.

On the other hand, the consulates are faced with the difficulty of not being able to change the consular fees they receive in bolívares into euros or dollars following a government decision. Inflation means that the number of notes is constantly growing, while payments received are declining in value very rapidly.

For these various reasons, the MS' consulates have gradually suggested different methods of payment for consular services (immediate payment in euros or dollars).

Some countries indicated that they adjust visa fees in particular cases (social cases).

Other countries issue emergency passports and visas in particular cases: these may not be recognised by other MS.

3.4 Exchange of information

During the meetings, the MS exchanged information about particular cases with the aim of identifying approaches that go beyond standard practice and drawing other consulates' attention to these practices. However, in no cases were names provided or any type of lists of individuals drawn up.

Figures showing a considerable increase in the number of applications both for visas and passports for binational citizens were communicated verbally.

3.4 Other initiatives taken in the LSC

N/A

4. Difficulties

1. Venezuela's economic, political and social crisis, which has already been very difficult for several years, continued to worsen between April 2016 and March 2017.

Many Venezuelans, binational citizens and foreigners are still trying to leave the country.

2. Inflation, the shortage of cash and the existence of various exchange rates make it very difficult for all of the MS to manage the consular fees. Nevertheless, all of the MS agreed to harmonise the use of the exchange rate and fees among themselves in April 2017.
3. Security problems in Venezuela, a reduction in the frequencies of flights and the cost of plane tickets between the Caribbean islands and Venezuela dissuade many people from travelling to Venezuela to obtain visas in consulates that have jurisdiction over that zone. These are important reasons for the MS having a great interest in reaching agreements with other MS on representing them in some of the countries in their jurisdiction.

Poland recently signed an agreement with the Netherlands on issuing visas in Trinidad and Tobago.

5. Miscellaneous

N/A



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO VIETNAM

12 May 2017

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) HANOI (VIETNAM)
2016-2017 REPORT**

1. Introduction

MS present in Hanoi: AT, BE, CZ, DK, FI, FR, DE, GR, HU, IT, NL, PL, RO, SK, ES, SE, NO and CH. **Consulates in HCMC:** FR, DE, HU, IT, NL, CH.

Representation arrangements:

Latvia: Represented by HU
Lithuania: Represented by DK
Luxembourg: Represented by BE
Malta: Represented by FR
Portugal: Represented by DE
Slovenia: Represented by HU
Iceland: Represented by DK
Czech Republic: Represented by HU in HCMC (from 1.4.2017) for the applicants residing in HCMC
Poland: Represented by HU in HCMC (from 1.4.2017) for the applicants residing in HCMC and selected provinces of South Vietnam
Slovakia: Represented by HU in HCMC (from 1.4.2017)

Use of external service providers for the collection of applications: Yes.

Coordination of meetings: EUDEL.

2. LSC meetings held From April 2016 to March 2017

Number of meetings held: 4 (21/4/2016, 2/6/2016, 8/9/2016, 16/2/2017)

Attendance: Well attended. **Chair:** EUDEL. **Number of regular meetings held:** 4. **Ad hoc meetings:** 0. **Reports drawn up by:** EUDEL

MS share the common report with their capitals. Coordination with the LSC in other locations outside the capital is ensured by sharing Hanoi's meeting reports with visa officers of Consulate-Generals in HCMC

3. State of play

3.1 Start of application of the Visa Code - April

MS and EUD's preparedness to ensure the tasks to be carried out in LSC under the Visa Code is good and there is an excellent collaboration between the members of the LSC Group.

Specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code as discussed in the LSC meetings:

Fraud: Illegal migration of Vietnamese citizens to the Schengen area is growing, promoted by local mafias which provide visa applicants with fraudulent papers and documentation to fulfil visa requirements. Additionally, illegal migration is taking place using alternative routes through Russia. Local anti-fraud coordination has been intensified under the lead of the DE Embassy.

The lack of notoriety of documents and the cash economy that is still predominant in Vietnam makes it very difficult to assess the applicants financial ties to the home country in most instances.

Visa Shopping: Some visa applicants are submitting applications to consulates of a countries that are not the final destination of the group.

Frequent introduction of last-minute visa applications by Vietnamese officials travelling for official or personal purposes: Despite several communications from the EUDEL on behalf of EUMS, Vietnamese officials continue to use diplomatic channels to submit last minute applications for diplomatic or official passport holders.

Visa fee harmonization: Some MS are in favour of the visa fee harmonization in Vietnam by applying the same exchange rate, however, MS continue using the exchange rate applicable in their internal budgetary matters.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

The list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants for short stay visas in Vietnam (in Hanoi and Ho-Chi Minh City) was adopted by Commission Implementing Decision of 4.8.2011 (Annex 4 of the Decision).

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The harmonisation of practices is regularly a topic of discussion in the Local Schengen Coordination group. This harmonization is carried out by sharing good practices and advice. MS maintain different policies with regards of the length and validity of Multiple Entry Visas (MEVs).

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information is regularly carried out in the LSC group, especially the topics of fraud, illegal migration, externalization of the collection of applications, use of online appointment systems and others.

The last time LSC statistics were collected was for the period 2014-2015.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

n/a

5. Other issues

n/a



11/05/2017

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ZAMBIA
2016-2017 REPORT¹**

1. Introduction

There are five Schengen Member States Embassies present in Zambia: Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden. Norway closed its Embassy in June 2016, but continues to participate in Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings with a representative from the Embassy in Malawi.

Three Member States' Embassies issue visas for a total of 23 Schengen countries:

Embassy of Germany	Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia.
Embassy of Italy	Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovakia.
Embassy of Sweden	Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

The Czech Republic opened a new Embassy in Lusaka in early 2017 and expects to open a visa section once fully operational. In the interim, and before joining the LSC as a full member, the Czech Republic has been included in the LSC mailing list.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Between April 2016 and March 2017, three LSC meetings were organized (in June, October and March). The meetings were usually well attended by those Member States present in Zambia, with only one Member State that very rarely attends. They were usually also joined by a representative from the Embassy of Norway in Malawi.

Guest speakers from relevant local authorities and insurance companies were invited to all three LSC meetings. All three exchanges were opened up for participation to the two non-Schengen EU Member States present in Zambia, i.e. Ireland and the UK.

In addition to the regular meetings, three ad-hoc meetings were organised in June, September and January with the three Member States (MS) that currently offer Schengen visa services (DE, IT, SE). The meetings focused on the LSC's joint work on the harmonised list of supporting documents.

¹ April 2016 – March 2017

All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation that also prepared the meeting reports. There is no co-chair. There is no LSC coordination outside Lusaka, as all visa issues are exclusively dealt with in Lusaka.

MS in general do not share the meeting minutes prepared by the EU Delegation with their capitals, unless there is anything of essential importance or a need for further guidance.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Regular meetings and contacts via e-mail in principle provide relevant opportunities for carrying out the tasks requested from the Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code. The meetings deal with operational issues in relation to the application of the common visa policy.

MS could potentially improve on the fulfilment of certain tasks beyond the physical meetings that take place every three to four months, e.g. through a more regular exchange by email on cases of irregularities or on local travel documents. During the reporting period, significant progress was made on the harmonisation of supporting documents that had somewhat stalled during the previous reporting periods.

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the lists of supporting documents

Thanks to the joint work of the LSC in the regular meetings and in two ad-hoc meetings in June and September among the three MS that currently offer Schengen visa services, an updated proposal for the harmonised list of supporting documents was successfully submitted to the Visa Committee in October. Subsequently, the LSC continued to work on the draft list based on the feedback received by the Visa Committee during a third ad-hoc meeting held in January. On 17 March, the Visa Committee discussed the draft list for a second time, and the LSC accepted the last round of proposed changes from the Visa Committee at its most recent meeting on 29 March.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No other initiatives were taken during the reporting period on the harmonisation of practices.

3.4 Exchange of information

The exchange of information within the LSC is regular. Meetings and other contacts within the group provide a forum for information exchange, when relevant, on statistics and trends, cases of irregularities, travel medical insurance etc. During the reporting period, the following was discussed in particular:

- Visa statistics were discussed at LSC meetings and information was compiled locally by the EU Delegation ahead of meetings;
- Fraud cases/'visa shopping' were discussed at the LSC meetings;
- An exchange on visa fees in the local currency took place via email in response to the extreme volatility of the Zambian Kwacha during parts of the reporting period;

- An updated list of representation arrangements was maintained by the EU Delegation and shared at each LSC meeting;
- Centrally compiled Schengen information (e.g. table of recognition of travel documents; compilation of bilateral visa waivers) was shared by the EU Delegation at LSC meetings, if applicable.

In addition, Germany and Sweden made the effort to visit each other's visa sections to further intensify the exchange between relevant staff members.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

No other initiatives were taken during the reporting period.

4. Challenges

1. Response to challenges listed in the 2015-2016 report:

- Harmonized list of documents: MS followed up on their strong commitment in 2015-2016 to agree on a proposed list for submission to the Visa Committee during this reporting period. This commitment was demonstrated not least by the organization of three fruitful ad-hoc meetings during the reporting period that were solely dedicated to the joint work on the harmonised list.
- Closure of the Norwegian Embassy: While the Swedish Embassy had already taken over the issuance of visas for Norway in 2013, Norway had remained an active member of the LSC group. Following the closure of its Embassy in Lusaka in June 2016, Norway continued to be represented in the meetings by the Norwegian Embassy in Malawi in most of the meetings during the reporting period.

2. Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2017-2018):

- Relations with airline companies: Two MS reported separate incidents during which two locally present international airline companies threatened to refuse visa holders access to their airplanes because staff at the airport counters misinterpreted the Schengen visas that had been granted to the travellers. The LSC will reach out to the airline companies concerned to increase awareness about the application of the Visa Code in an attempt to limit such incidents in the future.

5. Other issues

No other issues to be reported.

This report was drafted by the EU Delegation to Zambia in consultation with MS present in Lusaka.