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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Compilation des rapports annuels établis en coopération locale au titre de Schengen entre les consulats des États membres
[cf. Article 48(5) du Code des Visas]

- *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.
- 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 Member 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 1016 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.