**Council of the
European Union**

**Brussels, 9 April 2021
(OR. en)**

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
No. prev. doc.:	WK 12294/2020; 5065/21
Subject:	Summary of the 36th meeting of the VIS Advisory Group

Delegations will find in Annex a summary of the 36th meeting of eu-LISA's VIS Advisory Group.

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Summary of the
36th meeting of the VIS Advisory Group
11 February 2021

European Union Agency for the Operational
Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of
Freedom, Security and Justice (eu-LISA)

Summary of the

36th meeting of the VIS Advisory Group of eu-LISA

11 February 2021, videoconference

At the meeting of the **Visa Information System Advisory Group (VIS AG) of eu-LISA, held on 11 February 2021,** the Agency presented a summary of the operational activities of VIS, gave an overview of the status of VIS-EES Interoperability project, presented the report of the first VIS Testing Expert Group's meeting held in December 2020 and updated the AG about the status of the development of Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). The European Commission informed the participants about the status of the VIS reform and presented the context and state of play of a new uniform format for visas. Furthermore, eu-LISA provided an overview of the eVISA portal project, the VIS Release Plan 2021, the status of User Software Kit (USK), and presented the outcome of the Integrated Planning workshop held in January 2021. eu-LISA then introduced the planning cycle for the Single Programming Document 2023–2025, summarised the Agency's training activities in 2020 and presented the final report on the Multi-System Exercise 2020. The VIS AG members and observers were also reminded about the deadline to fill in the Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020.

First, eu-LISA presented the **report of the Testing Expert Group's (TEG's) meeting** held in VIS composition in December 2020. At this meeting eu-LISA introduced the VIS test approach, shared information on the Central Domain Simulator (CD-SIM) and gave a high-level overview of the Test Design Description of the compliance tests for VIS. This was the 2nd meeting of the TEG, which had gathered for its 1st meeting in the EES formation. Its 3rd and 4th meetings would be held as a joint VIS/EES meeting, on 19 February and 18 March.

The Chairperson of the EES-ETIAS AG gave a **status update on the implementation of EES and ETIAS.** He emphasised the need to adhere to the political deadline of the entry into operation (EiO) of interoperability by the end of 2023 that requires the completion of various systems by the Member States on time. Therefore, the VIS AG members were called to coordinate with their colleagues in the EES-ETIAS AG. The Chairperson reminded Member States that the JHA Council endorsed a two-month shift of the EES EiO now scheduled to May 2022. In April 2022, the Commission will launch the procedure for verifying the conditions to start the operation of EES and decide the actual date of the EiO. To support Member States in this process, eu-LISA and the Commission have jointly prepared a readiness checklist for Member States, circulated in January. In addition, the importance of the timely preparation of the Border Crossing Point facilities and infrastructure for airports, seaports and land borders was underlined. Border crossing has to be attractive for travellers, ensuring efficient checks and short queues. In this respect, EES provides a great opportunity for introducing business process automation thanks to investment in technology.

Next, eu-LISA presented the **highlights of VIS operational activities and statistics in the reporting period from November to December 2020.** The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is still very clear: the overall usage of VIS in the reporting period was at about 15% of the expected throughput. The system is performing well, and due to the pandemic the observed business deviations are less relevant as there is much less data. The decrease of almost all metrics in the reporting period is also in line with seasonal expectations. The amount of visas issued at the borders decreased significantly while the top countries where visa applications were lodged were Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, the Philippines, Belarus and Lebanon. As regards data quality and business aspects it was noted that in view of the interoperability between EES and VIS Recast the threshold values will be revised, entailing the increase of hourly peak limit of operations for the Member States.

The Agency provided an update about the **VIS-EES Interoperability project**, noting that phase 2 of the project progresses well, with activities in 5 work streams out of 7 being completed. However, strong interdependencies with EES and sBMS projects as well as impact of COVID-19 may pose challenges for the project. The Member States were called upon to share regularly status updates of the implementation of the VIS-EES Interoperability project.

eu-LISA then presented the timeline of the **Draft Single Programming Document (SPD) 2023–2025** comprising five phases. Drafting of the SPD starts almost two years in advance, with the final version to be adopted by the eu-LISA Management Board by the end of November 2022. The phases where the VIS AG contribution will be expected were highlighted.

eu-LISA informed the VIS AG about the **Multi-System Exercise 2020 held on 4 November**, which covered SIS, VIS and Eurodac. It was the very first exercise involving the three systems at once, executed in challenging circumstances of the pandemic. The multi-system approach will become more important with the introduction of interoperability of the systems. The exercise was a success, with 9 participants (at least one from each system), 10 observers as well as COM and ENISA participating in it. The VIS AG gave a positive opinion on the report, which was adopted by the Management Board in March 2021. The next VIS Exercise is foreseen for 2023.

The Commission provided an overview of the **state of play of two legislative proposals.** As regards **VIS Recast** it was noted that political agreement was reached in the trilogues in December and the formal adoption can take place after the current review by lawyer-linguists. The Commission presented the main changes to the VIS regulation highlighting that its implementation deadline is the end of 2023, in line with the overall political target deadline for interoperability architecture. In addition, the Commission presented the legislative **proposal on a new uniform format for visas**, introducing a signed visible digital seal to visas. The new feature will become mandatory by May 2022, requiring Member States' implementation by April 2022 at the latest. The digital seal has been identified by the ICAO and WHO as a possible use case for vaccine certificates.

Thereafter, eu-LISA presented the state of play of the **eVISA portal**, highlighting the project timetable and risks. The project is in the delivery phase, with three clickable mock-ups of the future EU online visa portal created and tested with Member States. The development of the prototype has started. It is expected to be delivered in May-June, and the project has to be finalised by September 2021.

The VIS AG adopted a positive opinion on the **VIS Release Plan 2021, which** contains four releases. The content of the VIS Release Plan 2021 might be subject to changes. Moreover, it has to be taken into account that this plan might require changes depending to the operational needs throughout the year.

The outcome of the **Integrated Planning workshop** was presented where the high-level strategies were discussed for migration to interoperability of the Core Business Systems (EES, VIS, SIS, Eurodac, ETIAS and ECRIS-TCN). The Agency will deliver an updated Integrated Planning External Dashboard with key milestones and deliverables.

Further, eu-LISA provided an update of the **User Software Kit (USK)** project and associated activities. Currently, there are 6 kits available covering VIS and EES. The USK will eventually be made available for Eurodac, SIS and ECRIS-TCN as well. The VIS AG members were reminded to use the Single Points of Contact of their countries to request any technical support or end-user licenses.

The Agency informed VIS AG about the **eu-LISA training activities performed in 2020** and presented the Training Plan for 2021, with a focus on priorities and dependencies of training courses on new systems. Whereas three online training sessions were developed and delivered for VIS in 2020, the 2021 training plan contains eight trainings related to VIS.

eu-LISA reminded the VIS AG to submit the replies to the **Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020** by 26 February to enable the eu-LISA Service Desk to assess its functioning. The results will be presented at the next VIS AG meeting after internal analysis.

The **next VIS AG meeting** will take place on **4 May 2021** via videoconference.