



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

### **More efficient and secure visa system goes live**

**Brussels, 11 October 2011** – As from 08:00 CET today, the Visa Information System (VIS) started operations. Visa applications will now be processed much faster thanks to the use of biometrics (fingerprints and a digital facial image) which will facilitate the identification of visa holders and help to avoid identity theft. This new system will allow for a quick and effective exchange of data on short-stay visas among Schengen countries. The VIS will also reinforce the integrity of the system and strengthen trust among its member states. The first consular posts to be connected to the system are those in North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia).

Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, responsible for Home Affairs, said: *"From now on, foreigners wishing to visit the EU will benefit from clearer, more precise, transparent and fairer visa application rules. The new system will also allow visas to be issued and verified in a more efficient and secure way. This is a big step towards improving and modernising the common EU visa policy."*

## Background

### A new technologically advanced system

Currently, around 13 million Schengen visas are issued every year by the 25 countries of the Schengen area, and numbers are likely to increase in the future. The current visa delivering, monitoring and verifying system is struggling to cope with such big numbers. It is not always easy to prevent frauds and abuses and the application process can be cumbersome for those who are legitimately seeking a short stay visa for travel within the EU.

The new technologically advanced Visa information system (VIS) helps to tackle these challenges by introducing digital facial image and fingerprints. The VIS will not only speed up the processing of visa applications but will also make checks at external borders more efficient and enhance overall border security.

Thanks to the new system it will take just a few clicks to verify the real identity of a visa holder, and therefore prevent and fight fraudulent use of visas. At the same time, visa applicants will see their applications processed much faster.

Visa authorities in all Schengen states will be able to consult the VIS data, for example when a previous applicant applies for a new visa. The VIS will contain all Schengen visa applications and all subsequent decisions taken by the visa authorities. This will allow applicants to obtain new visas quicker and more easily, as authorities will be able to verify the applicant's good track-record and reliability.

The VIS will not become operational in all Schengen countries consulates worldwide at once. Rather, it will be progressively deployed region by region. The North Africa region will soon be followed by the Near East (Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria), and the Gulf regions (Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen). All Schengen states' consular posts worldwide should be connected to the VIS within two years.

### A fast, fair and secure application procedure

The procedure for collecting fingerprints is simple, rapid and discreet. The applicant will only have to place his or her fingers on the surface of a digital scanner. When lodging subsequent applications within five years, the fingerprints will not be taken again but copied from the previous application in the VIS. Fingerprint data will be erased after 5 years.

When the visa holder arrives at the external border, the Schengen states' border guards will verify his or her identity and check the authenticity of the visa in the VIS. This will help to avoid the risk of visa fraud (such as trying to use someone else's visa) by allowing quick, safe and secure biometric verifications. At the same time, the procedure will be faster for *bona fide* applicants, who constitute the overwhelming majority of travellers.

The VIS was established by Council Decision [2004/512/EC](#) and [EC Regulation 767/2008](#).

### For more information

See [MEMO/11/682](#)

Audiovisual material:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/photo/photoBySearch.cfm?keyword=019658&search=smp&sitelang=en>

For More Information on the VIS:

<http://ec.europa.eu/vis>

Homepage of Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs

[http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_2010-2014/malmstrom/welcome/default\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/malmstrom/welcome/default_en.htm)

Homepage DG Home Affairs:

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index_en.htm)

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