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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Local Schengen cooperation between Member States' consulates (Article 48(5), first paragraph, of the Visa Code) - Compilation of annual reports covering the period 2017-2018

Delegations will find attached the annual reports drawn up in the local Schengen cooperation, as transmitted by the services of the Commission.

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



UNION EUROPEENNE
DELEGATION EN ALGERIE

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) EN ALGERIE RAPPORT¹ 2017-2018

1. Introduction

Dix-huit Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique en Algérie, à savoir: AT, BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE.

Pour les questions de visa AT, BE, CZ, DE, ES, HU et PL représentent respectivement SI, LU, SK, LT, EE, LV et 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.

En ce qui concerne la réception des demandes de visa dans la période de référence (avril 2017 à mars 2018) AT, EL, FI, HR, HU, NO, NL et MT travaillent avec 'VFS Global' en tant que prestataire de service extérieur, tandis que BE, FR et IT utilisent les services de 'TLS Contact' et ES celles de 'BLS'. A partir de mois avril 2018, FR travaillera avec 'VFS Global' à Alger, tandis que leur coopération avec 'TLS Contact' continuera à Annaba et Oran.

L'Algérie figure depuis des années parmi les Etats tiers les plus importants par rapport au nombre de demandeurs de visas Schengen. En 2017, 779.152 demandes de visas uniformes ont été déposées auprès des missions des Etats membres à Alger (744.213 en 2016), tandis que 502.706 visas uniformes ont été délivrés aux ressortissants algériens (507.185 en 2016), dont plus de 32.4 % à entrées multiples; ce qui place l'Algérie à la 5ème place au niveau mondial. La plupart des demandes de visa concerne FR, à savoir 78% en 2017, pour des raisons historiques et sociales (un nombre élevé des ressortissants algériens vivent ou ont des liens avec la FR).

En 2017, le taux de refus de visa était à 35,9%, en confirmant l'augmentation croissante par rapport aux dernières années (27,7% en 2016). Les Etats membres représentés en Algérie confirment un nombre persistant de tentatives de fraude, notamment à travers la falsification des documents justificatifs relatifs à la situation socio-professionnelle (en particulier à Tizi Ouzou, Oran, Annaba et Constantine) ainsi que l'intervention de nombreux intermédiaires dans l'obtention des visas Schengen. Les intermédiaires (type agences de voyage) proposent des services (invitations aux salons internationaux ou des visites médicales) qui dans certaines situations pourraient être des tentatives de facilitation de la fraude (des services ciblés pour les personnes avec un profil migratoire, sans travail ou avec des dossiers incomplets).

¹ Avril 2017 – Mars 2018

Dans certains consulats le délai habituel de prise de rendez-vous est généralement d'environ 1 mois. En période de très forte activité (Juin à Novembre), ce délai pourrait être supérieur en raison du grand nombre de demandes. Certains parmi les consulats ont renforcé la facilitation de la prise des rendez-vous (disponibles en ligne, avec une absorption des disponibilités presque instantanée), ou ont instauré un système de prépaiement avec le but de limiter le nombre de demandeurs qui malgré la confirmation d'un rendez-vous ne se présentent pas.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE en Algérie. Dans la période de référence quatre réunions ont été organisées, ce qui représente un rythme moins soutenu que lors de la précédente période de référence.

Le taux de participation des Etats membres aux réunions est généralement bon. BG, HR, RO et UK sont invités systématiquement en tant qu'observateurs pour échanger des informations sur des questions relatives aux visas. Dans le cadre de certaines réunions thématiques, y sont également invités CA et US pour les échanges sur l'analyse des risques en matière d'immigration et de sécurité et en ce qui concerne la coopération sur la migration et mobilité avec les autorités algériennes (entre autre concernant le retour et réadmission des ressortissants algériens).

Les rapports des réunions LSC sont établis par la Délégation de l'UE et partagés avec les Etats membres, y compris avec les consulats en dehors de la capitale d'Alger (notamment les consulats de FR et ES à Oran et à Annaba). Les Etats membres communiquent les rapports à leurs capitales.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Pendant la période de référence, les Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE ont continué leur coopération en conformité avec les dispositions du Code des Visas. Ce coopération était entre autre axée sur l'échange d'informations concernant:

- l'évolution des volumes de demandes de visas;
- les délais de rendez-vous et de décision d'octroi des visas;
- les services rendus par les prestataires de service extérieurs;
- les expériences avec la vérification des documents justificatifs;
- les cas de fraude documentaire et des intermédiaires suspects;
- le phénomène de "visa shopping";
- des efforts de sensibilisation par rapport aux pratiques douteuses;
- l'analyse de risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité.

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

L'ensemble des Etats membres confirme l'application de la Décision d'exécution C(2016)5927 de 23 septembre 2016 modifiant la liste des justificatifs devant être présentés par les demandeurs de visa en Algérie.

Dans la perspective d'une révision future de la liste, FR soutenue par ES (à eux deux représentant plus de 90% des demandes de visas) réitère sa proposition de remplacer la référence à la réservation d'hôtel par la preuve de la possession de moyens suffisants de paiement pour l'hébergement. Dans les faits, comme les ressortissants algériens vont généralement chez leurs proches, cette disposition est une source importante de fraude. Cette situation est à l'origine de nombreuses non-admissions à la frontière ainsi que de pertes subies par les hôteliers en raison de l'annulation des réservations à la dernière minute. En revanche, d'autres Etats membres insistent sur le maintien de la réservation d'hôtel, en particulier pour les visas touristiques, car ils considèrent qu'il s'agit d'un élément important pour évaluer la finalité touristique du voyage.

3.3 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres LSC se déroule à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et via e-mail, de façon régulière ou ad-hoc en fonction des besoins. Celle-ci concerne notamment les sujets décrits sous le paragraphe 3.1, ainsi que l'état des lieux de la coopération sur la migration et la mobilité avec les autorités algériennes (y compris la préparation et le suivi du dialogue informel sur la migration et de la mobilité UE-Algérie), dont la 4ème édition s'est tenue le 28 février 2018 à Bruxelles.

L'ensemble des Etats membres envisage renforcer l'échange sur les informations statistiques, grâce à FR et BE qui se sont portées volontaire pour centraliser les statistiques localement sur les visas délivrés et refusés en 2018.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

La Délégation de l'UE a proposé d'organiser une réunion thématique sur le retour et la réadmission des ressortissants algériens en situation irrégulière, dont le taux en 2017 est resté plus bas que la moyenne, notamment 22% contre la moyenne UE de 37% (17% contre 46% en 2016). Cela se traduit concrètement par 23.570 décisions formelles de retour pour seulement 5.105 retours effectifs (21.925 décisions pour 3.745 retours en 2016). Alors que plusieurs Etats membres confirment une amélioration de leur coopération avec l'Algérie, certains parmi eux évoquent au contraire des difficultés persistantes, par exemple: non-délivrance de LP par le consulat algérien en cas de recours ou lors de la présence d'une famille dans l'Etat membre concerné, la seule utilisation des vols directs commerciaux, la durée maximale d'un jour d'un LP, ou de l'imposition pour l'Algérie de délais d'identification très long.

4. Défis

Réponses aux défis mentionnés dans le rapport 2016-2017

Les défis identifiés dans le rapport 2016-2017 font l'objet d'un suivi régulier par les Etats membres de l'espace Schengen et restent d'actualité, notamment concernant:

- la communication de manière concertée par rapport aux autorités, aux demandeurs et à l'opinion publique au sujet de la réglementation Schengen;
- le suivi du respect des dispositions du Code des Visas, en particulier en ce qui concerne les délais de rendez-vous;
- l'application harmonisée des dispositions en vue d'éviter le 'visa shopping'; et
- la lutte contre la fraude documentaire.

Suite à la proposition de FR et BE, une réunion thématique sur la fraude documentaire est envisagée dans l'avenir proche, laquelle servira également à la finalisation de la base commune des contacts utiles de LSC (autorités algériennes, sociétés de transport international, banques, sécurité sociale etc.)

Les capacités de la Délégation de l'UE d'analyse et de suivi en matière de coopération locale au titre de Schengen, migration et coopération consulaire ont été renforcées depuis janvier 2018 grâce à l'arrivée d'un Expert National Détaché (financé par NL).

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2018-2019)

En plus des défis ci-dessus qui restent d'actualité, l'ensemble des Etats membres et la Délégation de l'UE envisagent de renforcer leurs efforts concernant:

- les échanges sur la base des informations statistiques sur l'octroi et le refus des visas;
- l'analyse de risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité (étant donné le nombre en hausse des départs irréguliers des ressortissants algériens vers l'Europe en 2017 par rapport à 2016).

5. Divers

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



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

DELEGAÇÃO NA REPÚBLICA DE ANGOLA

Luanda, 14 May 2018

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. Spain has a vacant position for Honorary Consul in Lobito (Benguela) and Portugal has a designated Honorary Consul in the province of Cabinda. There are also 6 Honorary Consuls for unrepresented MS (Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece and Malta).

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. Hungary's consular services are not yet fully functional but will be very 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

Five meetings were held during the reporting period. These meetings were well attended.

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.

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.

Document fraud and the reliability of certain official documents submitted by applicants were 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 proposal was submitted to the Visa Committee but following questions raised by the committee a new version was elaborated.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Nothing to report.

3.4 Exchange of information

The following elements are discussed and exchanged within the LSC:

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

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In August 2017, MS met to discuss, with affected airlines and one airport Security Company, the increase of the number of Congolese nationals with legitimate Angolan documents and Schengen visas who travel to Europe in order to ask for political asylum as Congolese citizens.

In November 2017, EUDEL organised a very productive meeting between the group and the new Director General for Consular Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the meeting, the authorities provided the LSC with a focal point for all EU matters. Many issues were clarified and the group suggested that an information session should be held on the new rules of the civil registration.

4. Challenges

Angola continues to face important economic and financial difficulties. It is difficult to predict what sort of direct impact the crisis will have on the number of Schengen Visa requests. MS register different trends. It is likely that attempts to obtain Schengen Visas based on fraudulent documents will continue to occur. These two challenges are regularly discussed in the LSC meetings and useful information is exchanged.

Trafficking of minors has been signalled as a concern by some MS.

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.



26 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) AUSTRALIA 2017-18 REPORT²

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 Observer Countries also attend on a semi-regular basis (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania).

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 (since 2014 non EU-Schengen Members also attend the Consular meeting following consent of the group).

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The LSC Group has met once in 2018, and twice within the last six months of 2017. Two meetings took place in Canberra and one meeting in 2017 was held in Sydney. The attendance for these meetings both in Canberra and Sydney has been very good, with all meetings chaired by the Head of the Political Section in EUDEL. The minutes of the meetings are prepared by the Delegation, shared for approval with the group and then submitted to HQ. We 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. Following the response from the Insurance Council of Australia, namely that their members are unwilling to alter their coverage in this regard and after consultations with HQ, EUDEL advised the LSC that under the Visa Code the LSC were required to set up a list of companies offering adequate insurances. A list was subsequently compiled of companies (both within Australia and off-shore) who offer the correct level of insurance as required by the Visa Code. This list was shared with MS with the advice that the information be placed on their websites.

² April 2017 – March 2018.

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

Following the adoption of the Commission Decision establishing the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applications of short stay visas in Australia, EUDEL advised the LSC and recommended that the List be placed by 30.08.2017 on local websites of those authorities issuing Schengen visas. There have been difficulties with compliance. EUDEL has monitored the latter on a regular basis and informed the group of the rate of non-compliance. As of 30.03.2018, only 9 MS have uploaded the list of common documents on their websites.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

This issuing of MEVs has not been a subject discussed in any detail during LSC meetings (some MS only issue MEVs with a validity of 1 to 2 years). There has been an agreement to share information between colleagues if they feel a candidate may be "shopping" around, but no suggestion to harmonise visa-issuing practices. For the smaller MS with low numbers of visa applications and a relative low security risk of the applicants and visa shopping, no additional harmonisation of visa process is considered necessary.

3.4 Exchange of information

So far EUDEL has been responsible for collecting visa statistics from MS, but input from some MS has fallen over the past few years. In March 2018, following indications by HQ, EUDEL raised the possibility that visa statistics collection be out-sourced to rotating MS holding the presidency but this encountered strong resistances. The issue will be re-visited at the next LSC meeting in July.

EUDEL shares information with MS on a regular basis with most information being uploaded onto the password protected AGORA local Intranet.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The LSC Group has created a spreadsheet listing the point of contact Australia-wide for Schengen Visas which is kept up to date. The information is currently being finalised with the intent that it will be made public and put up on EUDEL's website as well as the websites of all LSC.

4. Challenges

A majority of the MS represented in Canberra are also accredited to many of the countries in the South Pacific. The introduction of biometrics for the Schengen visa and the closure of some visa posts in the region (FR's closure of closing their visa section in Fiji) has meant that people from the Pacific island countries are confronted with the requirement to travel to Australia (for which they would need a visa), to apply for a Schengen Visa. In some cases they opt to travel to visa free countries (Singapore/Philippines) and apply there. Visa waiver agreements eliminate the problem. EUDEL advised the Group on the state-of-play of these agreements with several PICs.

MS have experienced the problem of “visa shopping” sometimes stemming from the different time it takes to obtain a visa, delay in obtaining visa-related appointments, travel distance to posts etc.. MS 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, but 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

The issue of Vanuatu's citizenship for investment programme has been raised recently. Vanuatu markets its programme by highlighting visa free travel that its passport holders enjoy in vast parts of the world (<http://vic.vu/citizenship>) including EU MS. Vanuatu is not the only country in the world with similar programmes, but probably one of the first in the Asia-Pacific region to engage in such practices (tbc).

One MS raised the issue of Nauruan diplomatic and official passports and the fact that some MS did not recognise them. The main problem seems to have been the non-provision of sample passports (diplomatic and officials) by Nauru to MS. EUDEL contacted DG Home for advice on best practical way forward, no reply yet.

***This report has been shared with the Local Schengen Co-operation Group.*



23 May 2018 / Baku

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN AZERBAIJAN 2017-2018 REPORT³

1. Introduction

The reporting period covers the fourth year of the implementation of the EU-Azerbaijan Visa Facilitation Agreement (further referred as VFA) (signed on November 29, 2013, entered into force on September 1, 2014).

There are 21 diplomatic missions of EU Member States, including the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Azerbaijan (EUDEL), accredited to Azerbaijan⁴. From non-EU Schengen countries Norway and Switzerland have diplomatic missions in Baku.

The following 12 LSC Member States are physically present and issuing visas in Baku (Azerbaijan): Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, and Switzerland.

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

The majority (8 out of 12) of the LSC members are using external service providers; one more LSC member considers starting the outsourcing from 2019.

2. LSC meetings held in reporting period April 2017-March 2018

During the reported period several LSC meetings (in May, June, July, Oct, Dec) were held based on necessity. All meetings were well attended gathering between ten to twelve LSC members on average. Non LSC EU MS sometimes participated as observers in the meetings upon the common agreement of the LSC participants. An ad hoc meeting was held with a representative from the USA on the subjects of mutual interests.

³ April 2017-March 2018

⁴ Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Slovak Republic and Slovenia have their diplomatic representations accredited outside of Azerbaijan.

As a rule all meetings were held in the premises of the EUDEL. All meetings were called upon and chaired by the representative of EUDEL. Taking into account the local practices in other third countries, the suggestion for having a rotating chairmanship between LSC members was made. However, it has not yet received the support.

On 5 July the EU-Azerbaijan Joint Visa Committee meeting was held in Baku with presence of many LSC members.

The reports of the meetings were prepared occasionally by the EUDEL and shared with MS on irregular basis, depending on the availability of the resources. There is no established practice to share the reports prepared by individual MS. Despite of that, the coordination with the LSC is working smoothly, no gaps in cooperation were noted.

The main issues discussed during the LSC meetings were as follows: the trends of visa statistics, issues related to the implementation of VFA, in particular: MEV with long term validity, visa fees and waivers, visa issued in the airport, for family members, exchanges on the host nation legislation, fraud cases during the application process, sharing the burden between EUDEL and LSC members in chairing and compiling the statistics.

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 LSC states consular offices located in Azerbaijan.

Specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code as discussed in the LSC meetings

One specific problem arose when on 30 November LSC members learnt (through their capitals) about the request of one EU MS to activate the prior consultations procedure in accordance with Article 22 of the Visa Code. The procedure had to be put in place starting from 1 December 2017. A coordination meeting on a short notice was held to have an exchange about the prompt implementation of this procedure locally and to discuss on the implications to the daily work on local consuls. LSC members noted that they were not informed timely about a newly introduced procedure.

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 harmonisation 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.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

During the meetings LSC has had regular exchanges on various supporting documents, including the use of passports upon the change of the surname, reliability of the supporting statements from banks and need to demand for their period of validity, the reliability of electronic employment certificates, pay slips, other.

During the reporting period, long validity MEVs were issued by LSC partners according to the Article 5 of the VFA. The issuance of MEV was constantly discussed within LSC, including the need to have a reciprocal approach. The LSC consulted the Headquarter (DG Home) regularly on relevant long validity MEV issuing practices.

Almost all LSC members (with exception of one) shared the information about MEVs issued for the period of (a) ≤ 1 year validity (around 85% out of the overall number of MEVs); (b) $> 1 < 5$ years validity (around 13%) and (c) 5 years validity (around 1.38%). MEVs makes around 37-39 % out of overall number of all visas issued.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC and EUDEL regularly shared respective information. On some occasions there were delays or disruptions in sharing the information (both in the embassies of MS, as well as in EUDEL) namely during the transit period, when the staffs was changing and incoming staff was entering into new duties, also due to a fact that the most of the staff are "multi-hatted" and have to carry other urgent prevailing tasks.

- *statistics*

As a rule, statistics were provided regularly by LSC members to the EUDEL on a monthly basis and then were compiled into an annual overview. EUDEL took care of this task until the end of 2017. From the beginning of 2018 a new practice was started when Member States kindly agreed to compile the statistics on trimestral basis.

- *cases of fraud*

Mutual efforts were made to ensure the exchange of information on bad practices: "visa shopping", false proof of employment, ticket bookings, reservations for accommodation as well as reliability of the employment statements. 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, falsified bank statements, falsified job statements.

- *travel medical insurance (TMI) (i.e. insurance companies offering adequate TMI*

The discussions took place on the fraud of travel medical insurance.

- *implementation of the Visa Information System*

Several exchanges during meetings or via e-mail and phone on various issues took place. The EUDEL facilitated LSC by arranging a telephone conference with the Headquarter on the efficient use and functionalities of VIS.

- *use of VISMail*

Several discussions encouraging the use of VISMail took place during the LSC meetings. This helped LSC members to facilitate solving some programming issues in their respective national visa information systems and to improve the use of VISMail function.

- *Migration risks*

Various times the high migration pressure in Azerbaijan and subsequent requests for political asylum within the Schengen area were addressed during the meetings. Risk profiles were shared as well as current trends and statistics.

- *Other issues*

The exchanges within LSC also were related to the new legislations or new visa procedures to be out in place.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Several outside guests were invited to the LSC meetings such as the consular of the US embassy, visiting colleagues from MS, Azerbaijani officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

LSC members took part in the EU-AZ Joint Visa Committee meeting held in Baku on 9 July 2017.

LSC members together with their security experts actively contributed in preparation work of the EU Joint consular crisis management plan. EUDEL organised a joint visit together with LSC members to the Ministry of Emergency on 24 April 2018 to learn more about the crisis management procedures in Azerbaijan.

Two trainings were held where LSC members were invited: by Austria on illegal migration trends in March 2017 and by Germany on document forgeries in April 2018.

4. Challenges

Response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2016-2017 report

- LSC established a "hotline" with a Consular section in the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan.
- The share of information related to the updates on national legislation, as provided by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan, has improved a lot.
- The regular exchanges to address suspected cases of visa fraud or migration alerts have been improved.
- Starting from 2018, the request addressed to LSC by the EUDEL to help in compiling the statistics was responded positively by couple of MS.

Challenges 2017-2018

- Ensuring the continuity of the LSC meetings and sharing the burden in chairing them by volunteering LSC members.
- Continuing to share the information on legal updates related to consular issues.
- Organising training sessions in Baku with participation of competent Commission DG and MS experts on relevant to LSC issues.
- The need to follow up the implementation of the VFA with particular focus to the issuance of long term duration MEV from the Azerbaijan side. In addition, ensuring that the online visa application system integrates the obligations arising from the implementation of the VFA.

5. Other issues

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



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BANGLADESH

Head of Administration

Dhaka, 11 March 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN BANGLADESH 2017-2018 REPORT⁵

1. Introduction

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

Schengen Member State	Represents	Represented by
Denmark	Norway	
France	Austria, Czech Republic, 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 2017-2018

EU Delegation, Head of Administration, chairs the LSC meetings.

Meetings are scheduled on a 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.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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.

⁵ April 2017 – March 2018

Regular meetings took place according to the following calendar:

Month	Day
May 2017	7 th
August 2017	1 st
October 2017	16 th
February 2018	19 th

No ad hoc meetings took place.

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

The harmonized list for visa applications for Bangladesh was adopted on 30 August 2017. Implementation by MS in Bangladesh was agreed to start on 14 September 2017.

All MS updated their information and websites accordingly.

None of the MS has raised any difficulty with the implementation.

None of the MS sees any need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

MS spent time in the LSC meeting in October to exchange views on their respective experience with the implementation of the Harmonized list. No issues were reported.

In line with the Visa Code article 16 (7), MS attempted harmonizing the visa fee. Unfortunately, it had to be concluded that the different systems do not allow for full implementation of article 16(7). Some MS however adjusted the fees to reduce some of the gaps, differences observed.

MS have on several occasions exchanged view regarding the practice for issuing visa for applicants with special or official passports, depending on the fact whether a Note Verbale is presented and depending on the purpose of the travel. MS aim to follow the same line for such cases.

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).

MS rarely use VIS. Some MS are not fully aware of the VIS system.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

According to the Visa Code Article 48.3.a, 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.

Significant improvement has been observed since the previous reporting period in that all MS provide share their statistics.

4. Challenges

1. *Response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2016-2017 report*
 - a. Implementation of the Harmonized list – the harmonized list is implemented since 14 September 2017;
 - b. Continuation of the collated statistics – statistics are shared by all MS on a regular basis and Chair LSC collates and circulates to all MS.
2. *Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2018-2019)*

LSC Bangladesh agreed to review the list of travel medical insurance companies, (Visa Code art. 10.3.g and art. 15): only a few companies appear to be regularly used by applicants; some applicants also subscribe policies with international insurance companies outside of Bangladesh.

5. Other issues

This annual report was drafted by the LSC Chair and commented by LSC MS. The final version has been approved by all MS LSC Bangladesh.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BELARUS

10/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BELARUS 2017-2018 REPORT⁶

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, Lithuania, Spain, Poland and Lithuania;
- Lithuania represents Greece only for official delegations and diplomatic passports, as well as Latvia and Czech Republic in Grodno (for Grodno and Brest regions);
- Slovakia represents Portugal.

Nine MS operate 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 2017-2018

During the reporting period there were three LSC meetings (on 19 June 2017, 25 October 2017 and 14 February 2018). The meeting in June was attended by DG HOME in preparation for the negotiations on the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements which took place on the 20 June 2017.

The meetings are generally well attended; 9-10 MS were usually present in the meetings in the reporting period. Embassies of Bulgaria and Romania are always invited to the meetings and sometimes attend.

⁶ April 2017 – March 2018

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, etc.).

3. State of play

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.

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.

The 2017 proposal of an amendment to the List to include shopping as a purpose of travel has not been pursued.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In the reporting period, the MS continued to apply harmonised 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.

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 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.

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, border controls etc.

EUDEL encouraged MS to take part in online consultations on visa issues launched by the European Commission.

EU financed project Mobility Scheme for Targeted People-to-People Contacts enjoyed support of the MS in facilitating the issuance of visas for project participants and in spreading information about the possibility to travel to MS provided to BY citizens within the project.

Following COHOM discussion on human rights defenders and visa issues on 6 September 2017, MS discussed the situation in this regard in Belarus.

MS also discussed the migration risk posed by foreign students in Belarus (and other migration risks) but came to the conclusion that Belarus should not be considered a transit country for illegal migration.

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, the Mobility Partnership and projects resulting from cooperation in these fields. EUDEL asked the MS to promote - in their bilateral contacts with BY authorities – the EU latest proposal and advocate for the quick finalisation of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements negotiations.

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. However due to the state of EU-BY relations, it may be more prudent to do this work only upon the entry into force of the Agreement.

The report was approved by the Member States on 9 April 2018.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION EN REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN (LSC) A COTONOU (BENIN) - RAPPORT⁷ 2017-2018

1. Introduction

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

La France couvre les demandes de visas pour la Belgique, la République Tchèque, l'Estonie, la Grèce, l'Espagne, l'Italie, la Lituanie, la Hongrie, Malte, l'Autriche, le Portugal et la Suisse.

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. Ce Bureau traite aussi les demandes de visas pour le Luxembourg et la Finlande.

Concernant le nombre de demandes traitées par les EM: la France traite environ 12.000 demandes par an et l'Allemagne environ 1.400 demandes par an (année 2016), soit une forte diminution des demandes de 20% vers l'Allemagne par rapport à l'année précédente. Le taux de refus pour la France s'est élevé à environ 17% en 2017, pour environ 20% de refus pour l'Allemagne et 26% pour les Pays-Bas.

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 en moyenne deux fois par semestre.

Pendant la période d'avril 2017 à mars 2018, nous avons tenu 3 réunions Schengen (07/06/2017, 8/11/2017, 21/03/2018) avec une participation des Etats Schengen présents au Bénin (y compris la Suisse).

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.

⁷ Avril 2017 – Mars 2018

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.

La difficulté majeure à laquelle font face les consulats porte sur les cas de **fraude documentaire** (relevés bancaires falsifiés, fausses déclarations d'importation, faux contrats de travail, faux diplômes, 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.

Une importante action a été menée pour lutter contre les faux justificatifs notamment bancaires, faux diplômes et fausses attestations fournis pour l'obtention de visas d'étudiants. Campus France a sensibilisé sur cette problématique. La bonne coopération avec la police locale et les nombreuses interpellations ont eu l'année dernière un effet dissuasif à l'égard des étudiants notamment via la circulation des informations sur les réseaux sociaux, ce qui a permis une inflexion de la fraude documentaire.

Comme les années précédentes, la Suisse fait l'objet d'un "phishing" relatif aux bourses d'études: de fausses informations circulent sur l'existence de fausses bourses. La coopération avec la police a également bien fonctionné pour la recherche des coupables. Un mail automatique est diffusé sur le mail général officiel de la Coopération suisse/Agence consulaire suisse pour attirer l'attention du public sur cette question.

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.

La France applique depuis novembre 2017 un nouveau système informatique relatif aux demandes de visas. Pour le Bénin, qui fait partie d'une première vague de 6 pays pilotes, les demandeurs de visas devront rentrer sur le site "Logiciel France visas" qui leur donnera les informations utiles sur le type de visa dont ils ont besoin, et les documents nécessaires à fournir pour son obtention. Dans une seconde phase (prévue dans un à deux ans), les demandes de visas devront se faire électroniquement, avec l'envoi de documents scannés, et le visa sera aussi fourni électroniquement. Ce logiciel sera commun à tous les consulats, toutes les Ambassades, et le Ministère de l'intérieur français.

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.

Pour échanger sur des cas de fraudes documentaires, la coordination et faciliter le contact, 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.

Pour améliorer l'efficacité de l'échange des statistiques relatives aux demandes de visas entre les membres du Groupe, le Groupe a agréé qu'à l'avenir, chaque membre remplisse avant la prochaine réunion un tableau statistique reprenant les données relatives aux demandes de visas qu'ils auront traitées. Le modèle de tableau à compléter sera envoyé par la DUE. Ces données seront ensuite compilées par la DUE et distribuées lors de la réunion suivante.

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 (surtout pour l'obtention de visas d'étudiants).
- 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-Béninois.
- Certains EM font état de problèmes constatés à l'entrée de l'espace Schengen (voyageurs avec visa mais considérés inadmissibles sur l'espace Schengen et donc refoulés à l'aéroport, ou demandeurs d'asile en possession d'un visa octroyé au Bénin par un EM). Les membres du Groupe conviennent de mettre cette problématique à l'ordre du jour d'une réunion pour établir des profils de ces personnes.

5. Divers

Rien de particulier à signaler

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



UNION EUROPEENNE

Delegación de la Unión Europea
en Bolivia

30 April 2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in
BOLIVIA
2017-2018 REPORT⁸**

1. Introduction

Of the 6 Schengen Member States (MS) present in La Paz (Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland), only 4 issue Schengen visas locally. Other 19 Schengen MS are represented by another MS. The visa issuing MS are: France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Denmark closed their embassy in July 2017 and visas are currently issued by the DK Consulate in Colombia. Sweden never had a visa section here (SE visas are issued by the SE Embassy in Colombia), while Switzerland closed down theirs in 2013.

The countries represented by another Schengen MS are: Estonia (represented by Germany), Norway, Finland, and Iceland, (represented by Denmark⁹), 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 in the framework of privileged bilateral relations in the cultural, political, financial and business domains. **The General Consulate of Spain located in Santa Cruz is the only LSC consular section situated outside the Capital city of La Paz.**

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). MS have expressed their satisfaction at the service offered by these providers over the past 12 months.

The total number of visa applications received in Bolivia in 2017-2018 (21,590) was 11.3% higher than the number received in 2016 (19,401). The average refusal rate increased to 15.7% against 8.46% in 2016 and 6.04 % in 2015.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

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

⁸ April 2017 – March 2018

⁹ Also represents Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Regular LSC meetings took place on 11 May 2017, 6 October 2017 and 15 February 2018. LSC meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (Head of Political, Trade, Press & Information Section). Consultations on the comments by the Visa Committee were effected, by e-mail, between November and December 2017 and an LSC meeting, with the physical presence of Consuls, was not deemed necessary for December 2017.

The meetings were well-attended with an attendance rate of 100% among the 4 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. MS confirmed they regularly share the common report with their Capitals. There is no need for LSC coordination outside the capital given that only ES has a general consulate outside La Paz.

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

MS and EUD are well prepared to ensure the task to be carried out in the LSC under the Visa code. In La Paz, regular LSC meetings have been established since 2013.

Statistics shared locally in 2017-2018 continue to indicate some differences among MS on refusal rates. Despite these differences, 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, given their status as the main EU entry point from Bolivia due to flight connections. 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 the "ad-hoc" working group on Art 48.1a of the Visa code – Harmonised list of supporting document.

No working groups were created under art. 48.1; 48.2; and 48.3 of the Visa Code. Exchange of information on fees, statistics, fraud and migration risks, transport and insurance companies take place in the framework of regular LSC meetings.

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

The LSC, in the framework of the WG on art 48.1, chaired by DE, agreed upon a draft list of supporting documents in May 2017. The draft list was approved at the meeting of 11 May 2017 and forwarded to the Visa Committee.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

There were no other initiatives aiming at harmonizing visa-issuing practices. However, as a matter of routine, all MS in La Paz issue MEV only for the period of the travel. Exceptions (i.e. longer-term MEVs) only concern the case of family members of people residing in EU, businesspeople, etc; in which cases MS issue MEV visas with duration up to 1-2 years. Only one MS indicated they have issued 5-years visas in such cases.

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, a well, established criminal network dedicated to visa fraud (visa forgery), has been discovered last year in Santa Cruz (with links to the cities of Cochabamba and Sucre).

All MS use and are satisfied with the VIS system.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

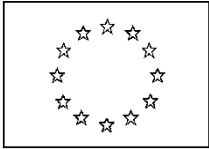
The List of Harmonized supporting document, reported as a challenge in last year's report, will soon be approved by the Visa Committee.

MS observed that visa-fraud attempts are getting more sophisticated, which renders increasingly difficult uncovering them. The main indicator to a possible fraud attempt is someone using awkward (and unusual) routings to enter Europe from Bolivia (ex: exiting Bolivia via land and boarding a flight to Europe in Santiago-Chile). MS reported good cooperation with migration/custom authorities in neighbouring countries is essential to defuse these attempts. Some suggested that having a police officer exclusively dedicated to screen the documentation provided by visa applicants could be helpful (though all recognize this would be expensive).

5. Other issues

Nothing to report.

***Note:** The present report has been drafted during the "ad-hoc" LSC meeting of 24 April 2018 and approved, in its final version, by all MS concerned, by e-mail exchanges afterwards).*



26 April 2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
2017-2018 REPORT¹⁰**

1. 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 meetings¹¹.

Compared to the previous reporting period, the number of visa applications decreased, thus there was no need for outsourcing the related services to the private sector.

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 single company able to provide BiH with the needed biometric passports (Muehlbauer). Within the four-year contract period the German company will supply the BiH authorities with biometric passports, whilst personalization and issuing will be conducted by the BiH authorities. This means that BiH passport supply and issuing processes are secured.

2. LSC meetings held between April 2017 and March 2018

In the reporting period, EUD chaired two regular LSC meetings (21 September 2017, 14 December 2017; and a further meeting closely after the end of the reporting period, on 20 April). 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.

¹⁰ April 2017 – March 2018

¹¹ Visa free regime for BiH citizens is valid also in RO and BG.

Beside other issues, the LSC meetings mainly discussed the three following standard 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.

3. 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.

The most recent changes to the Decision on the BiH CoM on Visas were in September 2017, published in the Official Gazette of BiH no. 73/17. The changes included introduction of additional flexibility for holders of EU, Schengen and USA visas travelling through BiH, meaning the travellers coming from the countries that have visa regime with BiH can now transit through BiH without a need to get transit visas. Additionally, they can stay in BiH for a period that would not exceed 30 consecutive days.

As some MSs had expressed their willingness to introduce information on C visa applicants' nationalities as well as on the number of long-term D visas (although these are subject to national legislation), from the first Quarter of 2017 the local statistics included also data on the nationalities as well as on long-term visas. However, in the meeting of September 2017, representatives of the German Embassy announced that they would have not provided any more information on visas D. As consequence of this, since January 2018 data collected on visas D do not include those of the German Embassy.

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 health 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, the abolition of visa regime with some of the Central American and the Pacific Region states was registered. These changes represent additional harmonization of the BiH visa policy with the EU visa policy and the 'White Schengen List'.

Negotiations on abolition of visas for holders of regular passports of China are in progress. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the two countries signed on 28 November 2017 an agreement in Budapest, however in BiH the agreement still has to pass the official ratification process, i.e. adoption through the BiH Parliament and the BiH Presidency.

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 2017 – March 2018 showed a decrease for the visa applications, with an increasing rate of visa rejection. A total of 505 applications for visas C in 2017 compared to 1.498 received in 2016 indicate a **66% decrease**. The trend on issued visas C significantly decreased, about **68%**, comparing 442 visas issued in 2017 to 1400 visas issued in 2016. That means a rejection rate of 12% compared to 7% in the previous period. The number of multiple-entry visas issued **increased by 36%** in comparison between 2017 (1134) and 2016 (836).

Visa statistics in BiH in 2017 (per EU MS and Schengen Associated State).

2017	Single ATV applied for	Multiple ATV applied for	Single ATV issued	Multiple ATV issued	C visas applied for	C visas issued	Multiple- entry C visas issued	LTV issued	Visa D
AT (incl. MT)					0	0	213		1093
BG					105	101	92		19
CZ					5	20	52		311
DE					0	0	140		11681
DK					0	0	0		0
EL					295	223	2		42
ES					15	15	2		0
FR					7	6	18		136
HR*					46	46	150		0
HU (incl. LT,EE)					15	13	52		24
IT					0	0	179		634
NL (incl. BE, LU)					0	3	46	1	109
NO					1	1	0		0
PL					1	1	10		125
RO	5	3	5	3	5	5	5		33
SE**					8	6	2		1
SI (incl. CH, PT)					0	0	65		12
SK					2	2	106		0
Total	5	3	5	3	505	442	1134	1	14220

* 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.

The table below provide an overview of quarterly 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.

Most represented nationalities among visa applicants were Turkey, the Near East countries, China, and Pakistan.

2017	Sigle ATV applied for	Multiple ATV applied for	Single ATV issued	Multiple ATV issued	C visas applied for	C visas issued	Multiple- entry C issued	LTV issued	D Visa issued
I Quarter	0	1	0	1	69	69	158		4508
II Quarter	1	1	1	1	206	175	350		3915
III Quarter	4	1	4	1	180	158	324	1	4649
IV Quarter					55	40	296		1148
Total	5	3	5	3	505	442	1134	1	14220

Security of documents

After an almost two-year-long turbulent bidding process BiH authorities managed to resolve biometric passport procurement and issuing process. German "Muehlbauer" Company will continue to supply BiH authorities with the biometric passports in the next four years, through a contract in the value of BAM 28.5 million (EUR 14.5 million). Development of legal instruments/solutions that would ensure more sustainable and controllable procurement and issuing process is in progress. Once developed and adopted, the solutions would provide more control over the procurement/issuing to the BiH state authorities.

Visa policy

BiH authorities further harmonized its visa policy through incorporating countries of the 'Schengen White List' into its legal framework. Negotiations on abolition of visas for holders of regular passports of China and holders of Diplomatic/Official passports of Bangladesh are in progress.

Migration/Asylum (more detailed information provided in the readout of LSC meeting held on 20.04.2018)

Migratory situation in BiH in 2017/2018 has significantly changed and certainly deserves more attention by the EU in the coming period. Analysis of qualitative and quantitative statistics/information available suggests that BiH becomes gradually interesting for migrants heading towards the EU+ countries. Profiling of the migrants in the field reveals that BiH is not a destination country but rather a transit country. Reception capacities are fully used and local law enforcement agencies face severe difficulties due to a lack of human, financial and technical resources. Housing/reception capacities of BiH are nearing their limits, also due to intensified returns of BiH citizens from EU+ countries, especially from Germany and Sweden.

The number of registered asylum seekers in is constantly increasing (2015 - 46, 2016 - 79, 2017 - 380). So is the number of illegal migrants apprehended by law enforcement (2015 -179; 2016 - 218, 2017 - 766). The number of returned BiH and foreign citizens to BiH based on the Readmission Agreements and implementing protocols has significantly increased, too (2015 -44, 2016-119, 2017-522).

Integrated Border Management (IBM)

During 13-17 December 2017 BiH hosted the IBM Peer Review Mission, organised by the Commission and conducted by EU MS Schengen Evaluators/experts. The primary objective of the mission was an assessment of implementation of the IBM concept in BiH and providing recommendations for additional improvements in the context of the Commission's Opinion process, in relation to BiH border management capacities.

For an improvement of the BiH Risk Analysis policy, a TAIEX Workshop conducted in December 2017 facilitated migration from the CIRAM to CIRAM 2.0 methodology. Combined with findings/recommendations from the aforementioned Peer Review Mission, it provided an overall assessment of the risk analysis policy and precise measures to be taken for additional harmonization with the EU/Schengen Acquis.

With regard to neighbourly and international cooperation, the importance of the Joint Police Cooperation Centre in the security system of BiH is gradually rising and its use more intensified. Statistics on the quantity of exchanged police information with law enforcement of BiH and neighbouring countries through November 2017 (740) increased 212% compared to 2016 (237) and 1.662% compared to 2015 (42). Increased number of police information exchanged with the Centres in EU significantly increased as well, especially with the Thorl-Maglern and Dolga Vas Centres.

Regarding the IBM S/FAP, implementation is progressing well with no major problems reported. The IBM Annual Action Plan for 2018 is in the adoption process, including preparations for drafting the new IBM S/AP for 2019-2021. The new IBM S/AP is foreseen to include some of the new elements of the most recent IBM concept defined through the Regulation of EC on EBCG as of 2016.

With regard to illegal immigrants apprehended while attempting to illegally enter BiH, official information available suggests a significant increase. Compared to 2015 (179) and 2016 (218) the 2017 number (766) represents a 328% and 251% increase, respectively.

Trafficking in human beings (THB)

Legal framework on THB can be considered as fully harmonized with the EU acquis since amendments to the Criminal Code of FBiH have been adopted by the FBiH Parliament. This means all four criminal codes in BiH at the state and entity level are harmonized with the EU acquis, in the THB area, signalling an important step forward in BiH THB policy.

The legal and operational status of the THB Task Force still needs to be resolved by a decision of the BiH Council of Ministers. This task force is the only coordination mechanism in fight against THB in BiH.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND SADC

26 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Botswana 2017-2018 REPORT¹²

1. Introduction

Germany, France and the UK have embassies in Gaborone, Botswana. Only visas for the Schengen countries represented by Germany in Botswana (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland) can be obtained in Gaborone. Applications for most other Schengen countries are in Johannesburg/Pretoria, but a few can be much farther (e.g. Namibia for Spain, Zambia for Italy, Egypt for Slovenia). There are ongoing negotiations between Botswana and several Schengen countries for visa exemption for diplomatic and service passports.

There are little to no problems with visa applications of Botswana citizens. Other than an occasional student visa, most applications are short-term visas.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

No formal LSC meetings were held in Botswana in the time period, and make little sense with only one embassy issuing Schengen visas. Informal meetings take place regularly.

In March 2018, the Delegation initiated a first meeting of consular and Schengen officers in Pretoria in order to discuss issues of common concern. This was a very welcome initiative and should be repeated at regular intervals. [ca. 15 MS attended, including also German Embassy in Botswana and Spanish Embassy in Namibia; it was chaired by the EU DEL]

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

n/a

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

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

¹² April 2017 – March 2018

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

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

3.4 Exchange of information

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

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

For 2016-2017, several members of the COAFR working group had asked the EU Delegation and MS to look into solutions for issuing visas for applicants travelling to Schengen countries not represented in Botswana. Discussions are ongoing.

5. Other issues

The option of having a once-yearly LSC meeting outside of country in Johannesburg/Pretoria has been very fruitful and should be continued.

Botswana is a vast country the size of France. Thus visa applications from rural areas presents a significant challenge, especially if travel abroad, e.g. to Pretoria/Johannesburg is required. This has created a significant amount of frustration.

This report has been approved by all Schengen Member States resident in Botswana.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO BRAZIL

Brasilia 19 April 2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) Brasilia/BRAZIL
2017-2018 REPORT (April 2017 – MARCH 2018)**

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 Luxembourg in consular issues; 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. 9. **Finland** (short-stay visas for Finland are issued by Norway in Brasilia and by The Netherlands in São Paulo)
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**
14. **Luxembourg** (Schengen visas issued by General Consulate of BE in São Paulo)
15. **Netherlands** (issues Schengen visas for Finland at Consulate General in São Paulo)
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.

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). However, since 2018 EU DEL has organized a LSC meeting in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

From April 2017 to March 2018 five LSC meetings were held in the capital Brasilia in the following dates: June 2017, September 2017, November 2017, January 2018, and March 2018.

In addition, there was one meeting in São Paulo (February 2018) and in Rio de Janeiro (March 2018).

The LSC group always meets at the EU Delegation in Brasilia and normally is well-attended by MS (around 75%). When meetings are held outside Brasilia attendance is almost complete (90%). The number of meetings has been increasing since 2015, with discussions on counterfeit documents and visa shopping as well as regular information on the visa committee and the upcoming overhaul of the visa regulation. As a result, member states are more engaged with follow-up discussions online. 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. As of 2018, member states are also organizing ad-hoc meetings in Rio de Janeiro. EU Delegation is encouraging other consulates to also organize meetings on visa-related issues.

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 Harmonisation of practices

So far no harmonisation of practices has taken place. About a third of all visas issued are multiple entry visas (MEVs). Most of the visas issued takes place in São Paulo (80% of total in the country) with Rio de Janeiro coming second, followed by Brasilia.

3.4 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. There has been a special session on the novelties and changes foreseen at the next overhaul of the visa code. 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.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges in 2017-2018

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.



Praia, 15 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Cabo Verde 2017-2018 REPORT¹³

1. Introduction

Cabo Verde is a lower middle income country with well-functioning democratic institutions and overall good governance. Cabo Verde has agreed a Mobility Partnership with the EU. A Visa Facilitation Agreement and a Readmission Agreement entered into force on 1 December 2014.

There are four resident Member State Embassies in Cabo Verde: Spain, France, Luxembourg and Portugal. Many more MS have ambassadors in Dakar and Lisbon accredited to Cabo Verde. Portugal runs the Common Visa Centre (CCV) in Praia, which by now receives Schengen visa requests for a total of 18 Schengen countries. Among the four MS mentioned, Spain does not participate in the CCV and has its own consulate in Praia. Spain also offers the possibility to present applications in Sal and Mindelo through its vice honorary consulates (if no biometrics are needed), and send them to Praia for processing. There is an excellent cooperation between Portugal (CCV) and Spain in case further information on refusals/applicants is needed.

Cabo Verde being an archipelago with nine inhabited islands approx. 500km off the coast of West Africa, it is challenging for inhabitants of the other islands to request visas in Praia, but also for all citizens as regards visits to countries not covered by the CCV, and for longer-term national visas. As regards Schengen visas, the CCV therefore also offers its services on the islands of Sal and São Vicente on a regular basis.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During the reporting period, two regular LSC meetings were held. They were chaired by EU DEL and attended by all four resident MS, which had not always been possible in the past. EU DEL drafted the meeting reports, which were then circulated to Member States for comments, before being sent to DG MOVE and EEAS.

Portugal shares the meeting report with Lisbon. Spain either shares the common report or does specific ones if it is considered that there is a relevant issue to underline or stress to Madrid. France and Luxembourg did not reply to this question.

As all four MS Embassies are in the capital city of Praia, coordination outside the capital is not necessary.

¹³ April 2017 – March 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Apart from those mentioned in this report, no other specific problems relating to the implementation of the Visa Code were discussed in the LSC meetings.

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

A harmonised list of supporting documents is in place. In the context of the Third Joint Committee of the EU-Cabo Verde Visa Facilitation Agreement on 27 November, DG HOME has reminded resident Member States of the need to provide full information about the list of harmonised documents on respective websites.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Given the fact that the Common Visa Centre receives and processes requests for Schengen visas for a total of now 18 countries, there is a large degree of harmonisation of practices in place.

Different practices in the treatment of visa requests related to binational marriages have been discussed, but no attempt at harmonisation has been undertaken so far.

Long validity visas have been discussed regularly. According to a rough estimate, nearly half of all Schengen visas issued by the CCV now are MEVs. These are granted in accordance with the rules as and when requested by the applicant.

A specific issue in Cabo Verde is the fact that national passports have a maximum validity of five years. It is therefore practically not possible to issue 5-year MEVs.

3.4 Exchange of information

During all LSC meetings, a regular exchange of information takes place. This typically includes:

- visa statistics;
- cases of fraud, in particular false documents and "mariages blancs";
- overall trends in visa applications, seasonal variations;
- public debates, information campaigns etc;

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

LSC meetings have also been used to prepare the meetings of the Joint Committees of the EU-Cabo Verde Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements.

4. Challenges

As mentioned above, Cabo Verde being an archipelago with nine inhabited islands, it is very challenging for inhabitants of the other islands and even from rural areas on the main island to request visas. Therefore, the CCV also offers its services on the two important islands of Sal and São Vicente on a regular basis.

In the context of the conclusion of the EU-CV Visa Facilitation Agreement, false expectations had been raised, which in turn led to a certain degree of frustration among the population, which in many cases had assumed everyone would now be able to obtain a visa. This issue has been addressed by a reinforced effort at public information by the CCV, which is considered to have had a positive effect. .

This report has been approved by all Member States resident in Cabo Verde.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN OTTAWA, CANADA

2017-2018 REPORT

1. Introduction

26 EU Member States, and Switzerland, Iceland and Norway, are represented in Ottawa. Luxembourg and Malta do not have embassies in Ottawa. Luxembourg has honorary Consuls in four cities, but they do not issue Schengen visas. It is Belgium that issues Schengen visas for Luxembourg under the terms of a bilateral agreement between the two countries. No such arrangement exists for Malta. Most Member States also have an established network of Consulates across the country, issuing Schengen visas. Member States also have ad hoc cooperation agreements allowing one Member State to issue visas on behalf of another.

Local Schengen Coordination Meetings are held in the Delegation's premises once per quarter, back-to-back with the Consular cooperation meetings.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Local Schengen Coordination Meetings were held in Ottawa on 27 April, 6 July, 19 October 2017, and on 1 February and 26 April 2018.

LSC Meetings are generally well attended with the majority of represented Member States present on a regular basis. The Luxembourg Honorary Consul participates in the meetings at the request of the Embassy of Luxembourg in Washington, which is accredited to Canada. Malta is not represented in Ottawa and does not have a representative at the meetings.

The meetings are chaired by the Head of the Political Section (Political Advisor) of the EU Delegation to Canada. The notice of meetings, the draft Agenda, as well as draft and final minutes are circulated via AGORA, to the LSC coordination group, thus encouraging meeting participants to regularly use this Member States' secure information tool.

Ad hoc meetings of the LSC group, have been organised to establish the Harmonised list of documents.

There are regular contacts with the respective Chair of the Consular group (MS Presidency), to ensure coordination and logistical support.

In accordance with a well-established practice, outside parties are invited to give presentations to Consular and Schengen groups on topics of interest. These presentations are agreed between the EU Delegation as Chair of the LSC Group and the Chair of the Consular Group, and take place between the respective meetings, thus allowing participants of either group to attend.

During the reporting period, the following guests were invited:

- July 2017 - Ms Stefanie McCollum - Director of Emergency Operations, Global Affairs Canada, shared Canada's experience abroad with emergency preparedness and response structures.
- October 2017 - Mr Rennie Soobrattee, Senior Advisor and Liaison Officer for Immigration, Diplomatic Corps Services, Office of Protocol, Global Affairs Canada, on issues related to eTA for the diplomatic community
- February 2018 – Mr Alexandre Martel (Director of Planning, Govt Operations Centre, Public Safety Canada) and Ms Stefanie McCollum (Global Affairs Canada)

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Consular offices implement the Visa Code in accordance with instructions from capitals and Regulation 810/2009.

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

The list has been re-assessed during the current reporting period and re-drafted further to various discussions including an *ad hoc* meeting on 9 March 2018. Further to comments received from the Visa Committee, a new draft was prepared by the EU Delegation, consulted with the EU Member States, and re-sent to DG HOME on 5 April 2018.

3.3 Exchange of information

The LSC group agreed in 2014 to implement the exchange of statistical information on a quarterly basis, and an ad-hoc mechanism has been put in place and used during the reporting period. Since Canadian citizens (with valid Canadian passports) travel visa-free to the EU (for tourism, up to 90 days), the local provision of statistics is of limited practical use. Member States see little value in discussing these statistics, given the low risk situation of the host country.

No issues have emerged during the reporting period regarding possible cases of fraud or travel medical insurance.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None to be reported.

4. Challenges

4.1 Visa reciprocity

Canada lifted the remaining visa requirements for the two Schengen Member States for which they were still applied on 1 December 2017.

4.2 Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA)

Canada introduced an on-line pre-approval system for non-visa required travellers entering Canada for short-term stays (eTA), in November 2016. The Local Schengen Cooperation group followed closely the initial phases of the deployment, and in particular the initial difficulties encountered by diplomatic staff and their families. The issue appears to have been addressed by the Canadian authorities, as major problems are no longer reported.

5. Other issues

None to be reported.

This report has been approved by Member States participation at the Local Schengen Cooperation meetings in Ottawa.

Ottawa, 24 April 2018



Delegation of the European Union to China

5/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in BEIJING, CHINA 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) has a strong presence in China with representation of Schengen States encompassing a total of 66 consulates. All 28 EU Member States and 25 Schengen States are represented in Beijing. 20 Schengen States have consulates in Shanghai, 11 have consulates in Guangzhou, and several also have consulates in Chengdu (5), Wuhan (2), Shenyang (1) and Chongqing (2). Schengen states continued the opening of Visa Application Centres (VACs) in cities without consular presence. In May 2018, there were over 350 VACs in China.

After a drop two years ago, in 2017 the number of applications lodged in China returned to its pattern of growth, with 2.5 million applications (16% of all visa applications globally) representing an increase of 15.9% compared to 2016. The number of multiple entry visa slightly lowered to 33% (it remains well below 59,2% average worldwide), while the number of visa applications rejected rose to 3,3%.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The LSC continued to convene approximately once a month. LSC meetings are generally very well-attended. Non-EU Schengen States: Switzerland, Iceland and Norway are regularly present, so are EU non-Schengen states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania, and Ireland. The UK participates ad hoc, when relevant.

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.

During the reporting period, the EU delegation was invited to the local Schengen coordination meeting in Shanghai on 9 March 2018, organised by BG presidency.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

The LSC cooperated against the context of the parallel negotiations on an EU-China VFA and on an agreement on combatting illegal migration, opened on 4 May 2017. The first round of VFA negotiations took place in July. The first round of technical negotiations on an agreement on cooperation in combating illegal migration took place on 1 December. With a number of Member States having been reportedly approached by China bilaterally in this regard, the EU delegation underlined that since the European Commission had received the negotiating directives from the Council, it was solely mandated to lead the negotiations on behalf of the EU.

In the reporting period, majority of MS noted increased numbers of visa applications, while sometimes noting drastic rises in the refusal rate due to false documentation, including fake employment letters, bank statements, and fraudulent activities of visa agents.

The LSC also focused on pilot visa application projects tested by a number of MS, including the use of new technologies and examination of electronic documents submitted with the application for short-term visa.

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

While the LSC acknowledges the need to revise down the harmonised list of supporting documents, no specific proposal has been made since 2015. Moreover, the issue is expected to be addressed during the negotiations on an EU-China agreement on visa facilitation.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The LSC undertook a mapping of visa schemes in China, which allowed establishing an inventory of existing practices and benefitted from a detailed description of facilitation arrangements, if any, important from the viewpoint of transparency. The results pointed to a general lack of formal "facilitations" schemes, with a number of member states offering some sort of preferential treatment (special channels, fast tracks, reduced docs, MEV) to spouses of diplomatic personnel as well as corporate travellers, mostly from strategic Chinese companies. There are, however, considerable differences in processing times of visa applications.

3.4 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 detailed analyses did not improve over 2017/2018. However, the LSC held regular exchanges of views on visa trends.

VWA: The LSC exchanged information on recent examples of difficulties in the implementation of the VWA. While the agreement is generally considered to be working well, the LSC noted regular problems for visa-exempted diplomatic passport holders to check in at hotels.

VACs: The general assessment of VACs and the procedures in place was positive. However, a number of MS informed about communication problems with Chinese authorities concerning the establishment of VACs, with exceedingly long waiting times for replies, even though the procedures established under the first phase of the implementation of the MMD roadmap should be firmly in place. The LSC took note and showed readiness to regularly assess the state of play, with a view to considering further steps in this regard.

New means of payments: The LSC noted a growing trend of Chinese travellers to use new methods to prove income and financial viability in the visa application process, including through means of payment offered by major Chinese online services, in addition to the bank statements required by the harmonised list of documents. Those online platforms are hugely popular and widely available in China, especially in the service and retail sector. They also allow the consulates to follow history of the accounts, facilitating evaluation of available funds and social status of holders. While the LSC underlined the need to respect the provisions of the harmonised list and to have proofs of regular income, given the already established practice of most MS, the LSC decided to continue using such new tools on optional basis.

Travel insurance: The LSC discussed possible steps against a Chinese insurer (one of the largest players on the market) unwilling to cover high hospital costs. The LSC recalled that when assessing whether the insurance cover is adequate, consulates shall ascertain whether claims against the insurance company would be recoverable in a Member State. The LSC showed support to the MS but noted the largely individual character of the case.

Use of VIS-Mail: LSC discussion in January 2017 revealed that only around half of MS had access to VIS-mail. However it remained vastly unused. By April 2018, six Schengen States have not yet been connected to VIS-Mail in China, but were supposed to take contacts with their capitals to remedy that situation.

ADS: The LSC noted increase in individual tourism and visa applications; however ADS travel remains a constant feature for many consulates. Generally without major problem, the LSC noted the need to provide timely information about accreditation of travel couriers and issuance of "white badges" in order for the EU delegation to be able to record it in EU ADS table circulated weekly. Lack of a proper record may lead to applications submitted by couriers being rejected or delayed. The LSC also recalled the procedure for agreeing collective sanctions imposed on Chinese travel agencies in case of violating regulations, with proposals to be initiated by MS consular offices.

Visa facilitation schemes by China: The LSC noted the recent extension of the 144-hour visa-free transit to further Chinese provinces. Citizens of all Schengen countries, with the exception of Norway, have been authorised to use the scheme. In this context, the LSC confirmed good functioning of the visa-free transit (based on the absence of complaints from European travellers), with certain exceptions concerning travellers with previous visas from specific countries attached in their passports. As of April 2018, China also offered visa-free travel to the island of Hainan, with the new law allowing individuals to stay up to 30 days. It is an expansion from earlier policy that permitted tour groups from 21 countries to enter Hainan visa-free for up to two weeks. All EU MS can benefit from the measure.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Combatting illegal migration: Beyond a series of related activities under the Migration and Mobility Support Project (MMSP) financed by the Partnership Instrument and implemented by the IOM, the LSC prepared its participation in a visa anti-fraud workshop on May 22-23, 2018 offered by DG HOME and designed for the use of MS Consular Officers responsible for processing visas in targeted, high visa volume and fraud risk locations.

4. Challenges

1. Response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2016-2017 report

The EU and China started parallel negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement (VFA) and on an agreement on cooperation in combatting illegal migration (CIMA) under the 2nd phase of the MMD roadmap. First rounds of expert-level talks took place in July and December, respectively.

2. Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2018-2019).

Faced with growing number of visa applications in the context of limited resources at consulates, the LSC identified the following challenges for the year to come: i) slow progress of the Migration and Mobility Dialogue, including the ongoing negotiations on VFA and CIMA, ii) lack of clarity on the possibility to open VACs in further location in China, to release pressure on consulates, including the use of mobile kits (also in this regard, quicker approval of VACs in locations authorised under the 1st phase agreement), iii) possibility to use VACs to handle visa applications from public affairs passport holders, v) increasing number of fake accompanying documents submitted with visa applications, vi) possible visa shopping, mostly through varying times of handling visa applications, and vii) incomplete data sets in VIS and the need for a follow up interview.

5. Other issues

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 IOM will also work on a study to help fight the irregular migration services on offer through social media, including Hukou, certificates of employment, licenses, and university diplomas etc., used in visa application procedures.



06/02/2018

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) Brazzaville
RAPPORT¹ 2017-2018**

1. Introduction

Trois Etats membres ont des ambassadeurs résidents à Brazzaville : Allemagne, France et Italie. L'Allemagne n'a pas de compétences consulaires et 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 Suisse est le seul Etat membre de l'espace Schengen basé à Kinshasa à délivrer des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville. Ce cas s'explique par le fait que la Suisse n'a pas signé d'accord de représentation.

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, la République tchèque et l'Islande. L'Italie délivre des visas en représentation de la Suède, la Slovaquie et la Slovénie. Etats Schengen ni présents ni représentés : Danemark, Estonie, Finlande, Hongrie, Lettonie, Liechtenstein, Norvège et Pologne.

Pour les passeports diplomatiques congolais, la France a signé un accord qui dispense les porteurs de passeports diplomatiques de visa Schengen. Cet accord est en vigueur jusqu'en septembre 2018, les discussions sont en cours en vue d'une prorogation.

L'Italie et la Suisse n'envisagent pas ce genre d'accord.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

Le rythme est annuel. Pour la première fois, ce 5 février 2018 la Suisse a été conviée. Une coordination suivie hors capitale n'est pas nécessaire : la France et l'Italie échangent régulièrement des informations sur des cas rencontrés. Elles ont marqué leur accord pour étendre leurs échanges à la Suisse. Il est possible d'inscrire le sujet aux réunions mensuelles des Chefs de mission.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

¹ Avril 2017 – Mars 2018

Les deux EM qui délivrent des visas Schengen aux ressortissants du Congo-Brazzaville sur le territoire du Congo-Brazzaville ont une bonne 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) et après échanges au niveau local et entre le siège et la DUE, un projet révisé de liste simplifiée a été transmis le 24 janvier 2018 au siège pour nouvel examen par le Comité Visa. La Suisse a reçu notification de cette nouvelle version de la liste harmonisée.

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 notre siège. Chaque Etat qui délivre en représentation d'un autre Etat fournit des statistiques à ce dernier à sa demande.

Les missions représentées ont échangé sur leurs systèmes respectifs de prise de rendez-vous et sur les répercussions que des délais d'attente augmentés dans un poste peuvent avoir sur le nombre de demandes vers un autre poste. L'Italie et la Suisse s'orientent vers des systèmes internet de prises de rendez-vous et de préparation de dossiers en ligne (i-application, ORBIS ; la France utilise un contractant externe (OFIS) pour la prise de rendez-vous téléphoniques mais n'envisage pas d'étendre cette externalisation à d'autres services

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 ressources. 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 en particulier en RDC et en Angola. De vrais documents européens falsifiés sur place sont également fréquents.

La France et l'Italie sont conscientes de la situation et continuent à s'échanger des informations pertinentes.

La DUE, à l'occasion de cette réunion annuelle, a convié le spécialiste de la Police des Frontières françaises, détaché auprès des autorités congolaises. Il a fait un exposé, documents à l'appui, sur la fraude documentaire aux tampons et aux passeports ordinaires, de service et diplomatiques. Le nombre d'oppositions à l'aéroport national de Brazzaville est en augmentation en 2017, quelque 200 sur 18.000 départs.

4.2. Passeports de service/diplomatiques

Les autorités congolaises ont procédé à la destruction d'un lot de passeports diplomatiques retrouvés au MAECCE (« autodafé » devant la communauté diplomatique) et ont annoncé un nouveau décret diminuant le nombre de personnes éligibles au passeport diplomatique. En

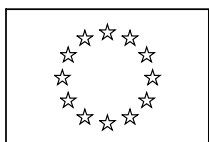
contrepartie, il sera demandé (à la France en particulier) de faciliter l'obtention d'un visa sur un passeport de services.

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.

On s'attend à une augmentation des demandes de visa sur passeport de service considérée par les missions diplomatiques comme une difficulté supplémentaire à surmonter.

5. Divers

Les faibles ressources disponibles au sein des EM et de la délégation en 2017 ont été largement sollicitées par la concertation que la DUE Brazza a lancée avec les missions diplomatiques des like minded en RDC (et la DUE à Kinshasa) afin de définir et d'actualiser les plans d'urgence et d'évacuation des citoyens européens vers Brazzaville en cas d'insécurité persistante en RDC.



EUROPEAN UNION

EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION
IN ECUADOR

Quito, 19/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) QUITO-ECUADOR 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

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

The following Member States have Embassies in Ecuador: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the 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 in Ecuador 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. Part of the management of visa applications, including appointments, collection of documentation, prior electronic processing of applications and the provision of documentation to applicants, is carried out, if the applicant so desires, by an external service provider, BLS International (service provider since December 2016).

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

The consular section of the German Embassy in Ecuador represents Austria; the consular section of the French Embassy in Ecuador represents Belgium, and the consular section of the Swiss Embassy represents Slovenia, Poland and Latvia in Ecuador.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Between April 2017 and March 2018, four LSC meetings were held (26/04/2017, 07/11/2017, 24/01/2018 and 15/03/2018). The meetings were attended by the European Union Embassies/Consulates present in Ecuador (except the Spanish General Consulate in Guayaquil), plus Switzerland and two representatives of the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation organised and chaired these meetings and drafted the reports. No LSC meetings were held outside Quito.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

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 with a close link to, and the main destination for whom is, the Member State. Other Member States (e.g. Spain) have a specific visa nomenclature for spouses benefiting from free movement.
- 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 currently difficult to implement in Ecuador.
- Visas for spouses: some Member States generally 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. In any event, as far as this point is concerned, it is always necessary to bear in mind the requirements laid down in the legislation of each Member State on the recognition of the marriages of their nationals that take place abroad (some Member States recognise the marriages of their nationals that take place abroad without the need to record them subsequently in the local civil register).

3.2 Assessment of the need to harmonise the list 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. The Visa Committee made three comments on the proposal on 4 October 2017 and 15 February 2018. At the meeting of 15 March, the Consuls of the Member States accepted the three comments. The proposal will be the subject of the next formal implementation decision.

3.3 Harmonising practices

The regular Schengen meetings are a good opportunity for Member States to exchange information and promote harmonised practices. The harmonisation work has made it possible to exchange practices between Member States.

3.4 Exchange of information

- Statistics: in accordance with Article 48(3)(a) of the Visa Code – in July 2017 and at the beginning of 2018, the EU Delegation consolidated the statistics from the Member States on the issuing of Schengen visas. In the forthcoming period, the twice-yearly exchanges are set to continue.
- Cases of fraud: cases of fraud continue to occur, as do irregularities and forged documents in relation to bank accounts, medical insurance and travel itineraries. In particular, it has been found that a proportion of ‘tours’ in Europe are fictitious and designed to conceal the true destination (‘visa shopping’) or purpose of travel.

- 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 initiatives taken in the LSC

On 29 January 2018, in a letter to the European Commission, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (the principal country of destination for emigration from Ecuador to the EU) proposed launching the procedure to move Ecuador from Annex I to Regulation (EC) No 539/2001 to Annex II of the same Regulation, following up on the request of 19 February 2015 to lift the visa requirement for Ecuadorian citizens wishing to travel to the Schengen area. In this connection, and as a result of the growing importance of this issue in Ecuador, the EU organised a meeting on 15/03/2018 between EU Consuls and the Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility (Human Mobility and Europe Subsecretariat) to discuss this question, with a particular focus on cases of fraud and rejected applications.

4. Challenges

1. *Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2016-2017 report*

There was a marked increase in visa applications in 2017 as compared with 2016, although there was also a slight decrease in the rejection rate.

2. *Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2018-2019).*

- The issue of a visa waiver for Ecuadorian citizens is becoming increasingly important in EU-Ecuador relations. The interest of the authorities, the press and the public in this issue is expected to grow. As far as the Member States are concerned, with a view to preparing the Commission's report to the Council, particular attention will be given to issues of migration and security, the fight against drug trafficking and travel document security. There will probably be a request for consular contributions.

- Ecuador intends to introduce a biometric passport in the short term. The latest information received from our Ecuadorian counterparts indicates that, in June or July of this year, an international invitation to tender will be launched to select the company responsible for preparing these passports, which will have to comply with ICAO rules. Current passports will remain valid until they expire.

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



30 / 04 / 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN ETHIOPIA 2017-18 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Ethiopia is a regional hub in Africa with Ethiopian Airlines having connections to numerous 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 and Somalia. The EU cooperated with Ethiopia on migration issues; in 2017, there was finally some progress in cooperation on returns of irregular migrants. In 2017-18, Ethiopia experienced political turmoil, violent ethnic conflicts, increased internal displacement and major changes in the political leadership with the State of Emergency in place from October 2016 to August 2017, and then re-imposed from February 2018 onwards. Since November 2017, granting visas to Ethiopians requires using a prior consultation procedure that created some tensions with high officials who were travelling to Europe on a short notice. The adoption of the Harmonised List for Supporting Documents in August 2017 was an important milestone in LSC cooperation in Ethiopia. Dialogue and technical cooperation with Ethiopian administration, including the immigration services, remains very challenging. Ethiopia suffers from poor internet connections and intermittent blocking of internet access, and there are some cultural and language barriers that affect visa cooperation.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-18

21 EU Member States, as well Norway and Switzerland, are present in Ethiopia. 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. In 2017-18, there were no ad hoc meetings with third parties. The European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO) attended the LSC meetings regularly and provided updates on the wider migration cooperation.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The EU embassies were making efforts to apply the Visa Code despite many challenges. The use of prior consultation procedure since November 2017 has complicated the visa process slightly, but fortunately it has not led to any significant additional delay in processing times.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

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

The Harmonised List for Supporting Documents for Ethiopia was adopted in August 2017. The LSC meetings regularly share experiences on the implementation of the Harmonised List and the prior consultation procedure.

3.3 Exchange of information

The EU embassies regularly share information about the statistics and the main challenges faced by the visa sections during the LSC meetings. In addition, 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 that brings together also non-Schengen countries. Joint trainings have been organised by various partners in Ethiopia and regionally.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2017, some interested LSC members organised joint familiarisation visits to the Nordic VFS outsourcing centre, as well as to the German and Belgian embassy visa sections. Some concerned LSC members also had a dialogue with the African Union protocol department to address the frequent visa problems with their official travel to Europe.

4. Challenges

The main difficulties to apply the Visa Code in Ethiopia continue to be the following: 1) limited staff in visa sections, in particular experts and qualified local staff; 2) technical 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 even by people with adequate financial resources; 6) numerous 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; and 9) political pressure of high officials to obtain visas without following the due procedure. The LSC members continue to address these challenges and to share best practices during the LSC meetings.

5. Other issues

In general, it would be useful to consider simplification of the visa forms to reduce the cases of misunderstood questions and incomplete files that undermine efficient handling of dossiers.

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in GHANA 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In Ghana nine Embassies/High Commissions are issuing Schengen visas: Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland. France has an embassy but is represented by the Netherlands. Hungary has opened the embassy for visa matters in January 2018. The table in Annex summarises the situation of Schengen Area countries, their responsibilities and representations.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

LSC meetings were held monthly at the EU Delegation and generally well attended. 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. The EU Delegation chaired the LSC-meetings, the RSCO² prepared the minutes and submitted input for the agenda. Specifically info on fraud, trends and statistics have been earmarked as recurrent topics for each LSC agenda.

From October 2017, MS and the EU Delegation agreed to have bimonthly LSC meetings. In the months without an LSC meeting, ad hoc meetings were organized by the RSCO for interested Member States (MS) on specific subjects. In November 2017 a seminar on verification methods regarding birth and marriage certificates (to follow-up, the Registrar from the Birth & Death Registry in Accra attended the LSC meeting in February 2018). In January 2018 a seminar with the Ghana Criminal Investigation Department and the document fraud office of the Ghana Immigration Service took place. Main topic was cooperation and the exchange of information on document and visa fraud, suspicious travel agents and facilitators.

This schedule of bimonthly LSC meetings and bimonthly seminars will be evaluated during the LSC meeting in April 2018. Also, a proposal to organise bimonthly extended anti-fraud meetings will be discussed.³

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The MS are well equipped to apply the Visa Code and share information on different kinds of visa matters. Only three MS (CZ, DE, HU) 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 MS relies on a regional centre for visa decisions.⁴ The total number of Schengen visa applications in 2017 increased to over 32,00 in total; NL processed the highest number of 9,142 visa applications (incl. its representations). The visa refusal rate in 2017 remains high around 34% varying from highest number by CZ (54%) to the lowest number of NL (28%).

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

² Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer, project funded by the Internal Security Fund of the EU

³ Including US, Canada, Australia, Japan and Pacific Alliance countries.

⁴ NL

All MS use the updated email distribution list of LSC contacts for the rapid exchange, consultation and sharing of information on visa applications. During the LSC meeting in October 2017, Member States reaffirmed their preparedness to ensure specific tasks. Those tasks are: gathering Schengen visa statistics, maintaining the contact list for verifications at banks and the list of approved insurance companies (based on article 48 Visa Code).

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

In January 2017, a subgroup of MS with the participation of the RSCO was formed to create a common list of visa requirements for all MS. The first draft was submitted in the first half of 2017 and commented by the Commission. Two meetings of the technical subgroup were organized on the harmonised list of supporting documents. As a result, a second version was drafted in November 2017. This draft was approved by all MS and the EU Delegation during the LSC meeting in December 2017.

In January 2018 the EU Delegation submitted the list to the Commission for approval. The comments of the Commission on the second draft will be discussed during the LSC-meeting in April 2018.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

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 and warn about facilitators, cases of fraud and forgeries. An updated and revised version is foreseen within the next few months. NO has the lead on the common list of insurance companies and informs the MS on any new developments. DK maintains a contact list for verifications at banks.

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 using 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 and AGORA; unknown to most MS and not in use
- cooperation with external service providers
- regional visa applicants coming from neighbouring countries, modus operandi etc.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As part of the project Schengen Regional Cooperation Officer, an RSCO based in Accra⁵ joined the LSC group to assist the EU Delegation in coordinating and organising meetings. The role of the RSCO 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.

As described before, the RSCO organised several workshops and seminars on harmonisation, cooperation with local authorities and on fraud detection and a seminar on verification methods regarding birth and marriage certificates. Meetings with the Birth & Death Registry, the Ghana Criminal Investigation Department and the Ghana Immigration Service were also organized. Main topic of those meetings were cooperation and the exchange of information on document and visa fraud.

4. Challenges

The main challenge is indeed the coordination of the group. The participatory approach we established is working quite well but an effective coordination would not be possible without the precious contribution of the RSCO. Of course, meeting will be hold as in other countries, but their effectiveness would be really minor.

Regarding general challenges, the problem in Ghana remains the wide circulation of false documents or real documents containing false information. We will continue and increase discussion with Ghanaian authorities and with other diplomatic representatives on how to deal with the problem and we will try to have the point at the agenda of the EU Heads of Missions in one of their periodical meetings.

5. Other issues

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

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⁵ Besides Ghana mandated for Nigeria and Senegal

Annex to annual LSC report Ghana (2017-2018)

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, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland**

COUNTRIES	REPRESENTING/REPRESENTED BY	Use of EXTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDER
AT	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
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
ES	Visa section	Yes, BLS
FI	Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
FR	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
GR	Represented by ES	Yes, BLS
HU	Visa section	No
IS	Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
IT	Visa section	Yes, VFS
LI	Represented by CH	Yes, TLS
LT	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
LU	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
LV	Represented by CH	Yes, TLS
MT	Represented by IT	Yes, VFS
NL⁶	Visa section	Yes, VFS
PL	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
PT	Represented by NL	Yes, VFS
SI	Represented by ES	Yes, BLS
SK	Represented by CZ	No
SE	Represented by DK	Yes, VFS
CH	Visa section	Yes, TLS
NO	Visasection	Yes, VFS
UK⁷	<i>Observer</i>	

⁶ The Netherlands outsourced the visa process to VFS as of January 2018

⁷ United Kingdom has outsourced the visa process to company called TLS contact (a Teleperformance company)



18/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Hong Kong and Macao 2017-2018 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 2017-2018 (

In 2017-2018 (up to April) LSC held 5 meetings. 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 2017 – April 2018

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.

4. Challenges

There are no particular challenges.

5. Other issues

None



1 May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in India 2017-2018 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 + 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 big majority of Schengen States accredited to New Delhi also covered several countries in India's immediate neighbourhood², hence frequently also processed 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 46 Embassies/High Commissions and Consulates General⁴, of which 85% (39 missions) processed visas. New Delhi is the only location where all Schengen States, but Iceland 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 two 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.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

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 include neither 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 and EL Global Visa Centre World

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. 15 Schengen States have 10 or more locations throughout India (seven States have a maximum of 16 locations), while the remaining States have at least six.

The remaining Schengen States in (LT, PL and SK) received visa applicants directly. In addition, two of the four prospective members (HR and CY) already use an ESP in India.

The network also expands into the neighbouring countries with a number of Schengen States processing visas in India for applicants from those countries, notably BD, BT, NP and LK, with applications collected either directly in Delhi, through representation or through an ESP (total of 30 VACs in the neighbouring countries).

In 12 months of 2017, Schengen States in India received over 922 thousand visas visa applications (airport transit + uniform C), an increase by 16% as compared to 2016. Schengen States in India continued to manage the fourth 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 and Turkey.

59% of all visa applications were processed in Delhi, while Mumbai was second with 25%, 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	545,046	31.2%	10.1%	66.5%
Mumbai	233,785	-1.3%	6.5%	51.8%
Bangalore	72,155	3.7%	5.1%	25.0%
Kolkata	30,052	2.1%	4.5%	40.9%
Chennai	20,585	-17.2%	6.8%	96.8%
Pondicherry	17,108	19.8%	9.1%	6.0%
Goa	2,808	5.9%	11.2%	9.8%
	921,539	16.2%	8.5%	57.9%

FR received the most applications in India (201.5 thousand – an increase of 29% as compared to 2016), followed by DE and CH (each above 100 thousand). These three countries accounted for 53% of all visas applications in 2017 in India. Only two countries have seen the reduction in numbers – IT and SK, while four countries have experienced significant increase >40% – CZ, HU, SI, LV and EE. Refusal rate in 2017 only rose slightly from 8.2% the previous year to 8.5%. Share of Multiple-Entry Visas (MEV) remained basically stable at 57.9%.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During the reporting period, there were nine LSC meetings (so-called "Plenaries"¹¹) as well as occasional sub-groups¹² meetings. All meetings took place in Delhi and were well attended with on average sixteen Schengen States present. 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 3.4

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 and continuously throughout 2017 and 2018, the Schengen cooperation in India was further strengthened by the presence of a Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer (RSCO), 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 draw 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 consider 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 Harmonisation of practices

As explained in the point 3.1 LSC in India achieved a high level of harmonisation.

As far as Multiple-entry visas (MEVs) are concerned, the discussion on harmonisation continues. List of practices by all Schengen States were collected and analysed. The approach varies between Schengen States, with only few countries having a well-established protocol and fixed procedure. On average in 2017, Schengen States issued 58% of MEVs as most missions deliver MEVs frequently even for first time travellers, yet the validity differs. MEVs issued for business travellers tend to be with longer validity, while for tourists shorter (sometimes even 30 days or shorter). In addition, smaller countries, which are frequently part of multi-country trips, tend to be more favourable towards MEVs. The definition of MEVs also differs between countries as in some cases only longer validity visas are statistically considered MEV.

3.3 Exchange of information

Visa statistics

Timely exchange of quarterly visa statistics was quite regular for most of the Schengen States. In order to ensure better circulation, LSC Plenary has previously agreed to exchange the data quarterly, and not monthly. Statistics are analysed and discussed at the Plenary regularly.

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 developed, 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 support of national Document & Visa Adviser/Immigration or Airport Liaison Officers/Police-immigration officers (DE (4), AT (1), FI, NL, NO 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). Three other officers are present in Delhi (AT, NO and CH), while one is covering India from regional office in Bangkok (NL) and the other works as a mobile ILO out of Helsinki (FI).

It was universally recognised by the Schengen States that there is a great need for increased help and presence of Document Advisors / ILOs, 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. Issues related to legal migration are covered by Local Migration Group, however Schengen States appreciated more information exchange particularly with regards to application of Citizens Rights Directive 2004/38/EC, as well as practice for students' visas.

Increase in a number of applications for students' visas was particularly striking, with number of application doubling and tripling for many, especially smaller Schengen States. Among the main push factors were the ever growing middle class in India, the shortage of places in good universities in India and the stricter admission policies in usual destination countries, Brexit and conditions set by the United States, Australia and UK for student visa applications.

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. During the reporting period, there were several high profile human trafficking cases that even led to group arrests both in India and the EU. Most of such cases involved trafficking or smuggling minors.

3.4 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.

Visa Anti-fraud workshop - January-February 2018

The workshop took place over 1.5 days on 31/01-01/02 2018. The aim was to support MS Consular officials to counter the risk of organised crime groups exploiting legal migration routes to facilitate irregular entry and illegal stay by submitting fraudulent visa applications.

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.

Seamen's application

Most of seamen applications are processed in Mumbai, and main issues relate to the validity and the number of days for seamen. With number of such visa applications likely to rise in the coming years, discussion on additional checks and background verification took place on several occasions. Particular attention was drawn to the difference in migratory risk between seamen boarding cruises and commercial vessels, with the latter requiring more scrutiny.

AGORA platform

During the reporting period, the LSC Plenary has set up an AGORA platform for easy sharing and exchange of information both for LCC as well as LSC. The platform is now fully operational.

RSCO activities

RSCO actively participates in LSC Plenaries, in India, mainly in New Delhi and Mumbai. He shares visa trends and patterns, best practices and lessons learned concerning the handling of visa applications from his mandated region, India and Pakistan (Islamabad).

In addition to his contribution to these meetings, he undertook several other activities:

- Fostering cooperation amongst all (current and prospective) MS and like-minded countries, such as Australia and the UK.
- Compiling quarterly overviews of local and regional visa trends and patterns in India and Pakistan.
- Organizing an expat visa officers' exchange day in Delhi
- Liaising with Schengen visa officers in neighbouring countries, notably Nepal

4. Challenges

Response to 2016-2017 challenges

The main systemic challenges for the LSC India identified in 2016-2017 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.

Similarly, the problem of visa sections' stretched resources poses continuous challenge to most missions. The issue further exacerbated in 2017 by significant rise in the number of national visa applications, in particular for students. Based on countries data, the total number of national visas for all Schengen States exceeded 100 thousand.

Challenges for 2018-2019

The main challenges likely to continue during the next reporting period are:

- People smuggling – all missions are regularly confronted with new smuggling schemes and patterns. Some organised groups (e.g. business, sports, cultural), at times even inadvertently endorsed by central government or state institutions, pose a migratory risk when assembling groups with both reputable applicants and those intending to migrate illegally. Similarly, high refusal rates for national student visa applications, where applicants are organised through networks of agents, prove the extent of the challenge.
- False, counterfeit or forged travel documents and supporting documents – travel documents are rarely fake, but at times fraudulently obtained or presented by impostors. Faking of supporting documents is more recurrent, sometimes also inadvertently as some documents might be difficult to obtain for applicants residing out of major urban centres. In both cases however, the legal follow-up with the authorities rarely proved effective, and in some cases there was a perceived risk that it might even lead to a disproportionate penalty or punishment.
- Insufficient human resources in the visa sections – growing number of applications, both Schengen and national visas, continue to concern many missions in terms of adequate number of personnel. High fluctuation in number of applications throughout the year, with high season usually culminating from February to July, poses additional challenges in recruitment of essential staff for peak months.
- Need for balanced EU-India cooperation on consular and visa issues – EU-India Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility (CAMP) is based on partnership and reciprocity. Schengen States in India recognise the importance of strengthening mobility and efficient granting of visas for both European and Indian travellers of all categories in a reciprocal manner.

5. Other issues

Not applicable

This report was prepared by the EUD in New Delhi and approved by the LSC Plenary in New Delhi Plenary on 25 April 2018.



Jakarta, 18 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

In Jakarta, Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings are held back to back with the EU Consular Cooperation 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.

Several Consulates issue Schengen visas on behalf of other Schengen States under bilateral arrangements, including Austria for Malta and Slovenia, Denmark for Iceland, Finland for Estonia, Germany for Latvia, Hungary for Lithuania, and the Netherlands for Belgium and Luxemburg. A growing number of Schengen Consulates use external service providers for collecting applications, whilst 5 Member States have not outsourced this service. NL moved the visa processing to its new regional hub in Kuala Lumpur in 2016, itself due to repatriate processing in Den Haag in 2018.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

There were 5 well attended LSC meetings held during the reporting period and chaired by the EU Delegation, back to back with the Consular meeting chaired by the Delegation in 2017 and by BG in the 1st semester 2018. The Secretariat is ensured by the Delegation, with reports sent to local participants who share them with their capitals, and to EU Headquarters (Commission and EEAS). Consular/Schengen meeting reports are also shared with member States through the HQ Consular-on-line platform (COoL). There is no coordination in the country outside Jakarta, with only one Member State having the capacity to issue Schengen visas outside the capital (Bali) whilst some member States collect applications in Bali and/or Surabaya for processing in Jakarta.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

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

Schengen Member States and the EU Delegation worked well together on fulfilling the visa code requirements. Besides LSC meetings, Schengen Consuls used the local Consular/Schengen mail and WA groups to exchange in real time information, questions, answers and experiences on Schengen related issues.

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

The Local Schengen Coordination agreed on 21/02/2018 on slight changes to the harmonised list set in the Commission Decision of April 2011, and has transmitted the proposal to the European Commission (DG Home). The changes proposed are limited in nature and relate mainly to the proof of travel arrangements, resources, medical hospitalisation in the Schengen area and verification of signatures for parents' permission to minors to travel.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

The coordination established in 2016 on **travel insurances requirements has continued**, 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 for information to visa applicants in the Schengen Consulates. The list has been checked again in March/April 2018 through contacts with all concerned companies, and streamlined/updated following that check.

The group shared experience on the issuance of **multiple entry visas (MEVs)**. Whilst some Schengen member States issue MEVs for standards short term visas as a matter of routine whilst other restrict MEVs to longer validity visas of 1-year or more. Cases of abuse of short term MEVs were reported in order to avoid requesting visas in non-Schengen countries (eg Western Balkans) that accept visa free entrants having first entered Schengen countries with a short stay visa. For long validity MEVs of 1-year or more, several MS reserved that possibility to applicants with a positive Schengen visa history, whilst others were more open to issue 1-year or more MEVs to first applicants provided that strong business and/or family links with the concerned country were demonstrated. In all cases, the duration of the MEVs depended on these demonstrated links and on the validity period of the passport.

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 in LSC meetings. 2017 statistics showed continuing trend in the increase of Schengen visas issued (200.127 in 2017, up 15% in comparison with 2016) as well as in the rejection rate (1.30% vs 1.04% in 2016). Reasons for the increased rejection rate were attributed mainly to visa shopping behaviours (ie requesting visa to a Consulate of a country with no essential or direct link with the intended travel), insufficient financial means of applicants, and weak student visa applications, notably in regards of academic requirements of European Universities. A main reason for visa shopping behaviours seems to be the time needed to have an appointment for the visa application, which differs between MS, reflecting also their respective workload in processing visa applications. Non-Schengen MS also shared their visa statistics, which reflected as well a strong trend of increase of visas issued (above 30% increase in the case of UK and IE) and, hence, of Indonesian travellers to Europe.

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 (18 bilateral agreements concluded; 7 under negotiation or project). In several cases, the implementation of bilateral agreements was on hold pending the inclusion of biometrical data in Indonesian Diplomatic Passports.

The **VISMail** has been used only marginally between a few Schengen Consulates, and is not perceived locally as being user-friendly enough to be developed as a regular communication tool between local partners; embedding an e-mail notification in the VISMail to warn recipients of the receipt of a message would help increasing the use of the system.

4. Challenges

As mentioned in previous years' report, there is limited staff capacity in the EU Delegation to carry out LSC effectively (one EEAS Official in charge as part of many other duties). Increased communication from/with HQ (DG Home), close local cooperation with the Schengen Consuls and learning by doing have mitigated this challenge. The Delegation Official in charge of LSC has benefited during the reporting period from a welcomed training in the visa section of the DE Embassy. Headquarters could consider periodically holding LSC training for EU Officials in Delegations back to back with the regular EEAS Consular Protection trainings.

5. Other issues

The LSC/Consular activities in 2017-18 were also the occasion to:

- discuss with the Indonesian Directorate-General for Immigration and other Indonesian interlocutors the scope and effects of the **visa waiver program in Indonesia**, covering 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. Dedicated meetings facilitated by the MoFA (April 2017 and March 2018) with DG Imigrasi, and during the EU/Schengen collective Consular visit to Bali and Lombok (October 2017). However, some confusion remains and these 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 migration and asylum crisis, a position that the Indonesian government is aware of.



Abidjan, le 29 juin 2018

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET
LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) en Côte d'Ivoire
RAPPORT³ 2017-2018**

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, ce dernier 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 2017, le nombre de demandes de visas vers l'espace Schengen est plutôt en hausse. La France a notamment enregistré une augmentation de 21% par rapport à l'année précédente. Tous les Etats membres constatent également que la fraude documentaire prend de l'ampleur.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

Deux réunions ont été organisées à la DUE le 14 juin 2017 et le 20 février 2018. Il avait été envisagé d'en organiser une fin 2017 mais en raison de la tenue à Abidjan du 5^{ème} Sommet Union africaine-Union européenne, ce ne fut pas possible pour des questions d'agenda. La participation à ces réunions est toujours satisfaisante, chaque Etat membre y étant représenté.

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 en général 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'approfondir l'harmonisation, qui est tout de même satisfaisante, la Belgique a coordonné les travaux qui permettent d'établir une liste commune des compagnies d'assurance. La France a quant à elle recensé les banques qui permettent d'avoir accès aux informations des demandeurs de visas.

³ Avril 2017 – Mars 2018

3.3 Echange d'informations

Les statistiques de l'ensemble des Etats membres qui ne faisaient l'objet que d'échanges peu coordonnés sont désormais collectées par la Suisse une fois par trimestre et récapitulés aussi sur une base annuelle.

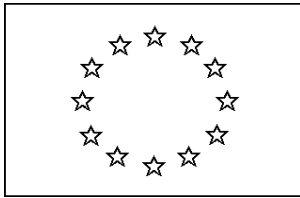
- Fraude: La France s'est engagée à conduire les travaux sur la question de la lutte contre la fraude. A ce titre, elle a organisé deux sessions de formation sur les bonnes pratiques de détection de la fraude en février et mars 2018. Il a également été convenu que des alertes puissent être échangées entre les Etats membres, afin de permettre une meilleure identification des documents frauduleux.
- Assurances de voyage: Comme mentionné précédemment, la Belgique a établi une liste des compagnies d'assurances les plus courantes.
- Catégories spécifiques de demandeurs de visas: La France souhaiterait une coordination et des informations sur la façon dont sont traitées ces demandes spécifiques (ex: footballeurs, artistes). L'Espagne connaît de nombreux cas de demandeurs qui ne reviennent pas en Côte d'Ivoire à l'expiration de leur visa et souhaiterait savoir comment les autres Etats membres traitent ces cas. A cet effet, il a été suggéré que le consulat le plus concerné ou le plus intéressé par cette thématique partage ses bonnes pratiques avec les autres et, éventuellement, de constituer un sous-groupe de travail consacré à ce sujet en tenant la Délégation informée.

4. Défis

Les défis restent globalement les mêmes que ceux relevés dans le précédent rapport. La fraude documentaire demeure un problème important, voire prend de l'ampleur. Elle 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 aussi une cause importante. 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.

La France a également indiqué qu'elle est confrontée à un détournement des procédures d'asile. Ainsi, 3200 demandes d'asile ont été déposées par des ivoiriens, classant ainsi la Côte d'Ivoire au septième rang des pays d'origine des demandeurs d'asile. 90% de ces demandes font suite à une entrée irrégulière sur le territoire, les 10% restants interviennent après l'expiration d'un visa de court séjour. Le profil de ces demandeurs d'asile est souvent le suivant: ils sont âgés de 35 à 40 ans, mariés et ont un emploi. Il s'agit majoritairement de commerçants, d'employés mais aussi de fonctionnaires. D'une façon générale, la France a constaté des fraudes liées notamment à de fausses réservations d'hôtel et/ou à l'absence de répondants en France. Suite à ce point, la Suisse a demandé à recevoir des informations de la part de la France sur les demandeurs d'asile entrés dans l'espace Schengen grâce à un visa délivré par la Suisse.

Egalement, la France fait face à une forte augmentation des demandes de visas depuis plusieurs années. Si l'externalisation a permis une amélioration de l'accueil des demandeurs, les locaux du prestataire VFS GLOBAL arrivent à quasi saturation lors de la période haute. La recherche d'un nouveau site est actuellement en cours



20/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) TEL AVIV 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

LSC Tel Aviv covers the area of the State of Israel. Visas are issued by Member States (MS) in the Consular Sections of their embassies in Tel Aviv. IS and LU have no representation of their own in this jurisdiction. IS is thus represented by DK and LU is represented by BE. Some MSs also cover the area of the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip from the Consular Sections of their embassies in Tel Aviv (FI, CZ, PL, SK, EE, LV and LT). Israeli citizens, holders of ordinary passports, are not required to be in possession of a visa when entering the Schengen area for less than 90 days. LSC Tel Aviv therefore essentially covers the cases of non-Israeli citizens who are residents in Israel.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The LSC meetings are held in the office of the EU Delegation in Tel Aviv. One well-attended LSC meeting was held in the reporting period (on 24 October 2017). The meeting was chaired by the EUD.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The interpretation of the Visa Code Article 15(5) requirements for assessing the adequacy of travel medical insurance schemes was substantially discussed. BE raised the opinion that foreign insurance companies must have an EU-based branch or affiliate as it otherwise might be impossible to enforce their responsibility of paying their clients' medical expenses. However, such a requirement would practically disqualify IL's biggest insurance companies. EUD suggested compiling a joint list of providers who fulfil or fail to fulfil the Visa Code requirements. MSs' input should be submitted at the next LSC meeting on 24 April 2018.

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

MS's agreed on Harmonised List of Supporting Documents. BE suggested that proof of employment/studies/unemployment/retirement should be a general requirement for all visa applicants in IL - not only for applicants, whose purpose of travel is tourism. MSs present did not raise objections and the List was amended as per request of BE.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

3.3 Exchange of information

MSs were informed about the plan to amend the legal basis of the Visa Information System. Consuls were invited to take part in open public consultation on the issue of lowering the fingerprinting age for children in the visa procedure. MSs were encouraged to familiarize with the study on the feasibility of creating an EU repository on long stay visas and residence document (i.e. residence permits and residence cards, issued to members of the family of EU nationals enjoying the right of free movement), finalized in September 2017. They were also informed on the latest decisions of the Visa Committee from 4 October 2017.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

None.

4. Challenges

None.

5. Other issues

No other issues are reported from LSC Tel Aviv.



Amman, 30 April 2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in JORDAN
2017-2018 ANNUAL 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, GR), 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.

Several MS 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 2017-2018

Four LSC meetings were held in the reporting period (in June and October and December 2017 and February 2018). The meetings were well attended with regular participation by most of the MS which have embassies in Amman. Throughout the reporting period, EUDEL chaired the LSC meetings in EUDEL premises 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

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

MS saw a rise in visa applications of spouses of EU citizens under the freedom of movement right. The question of if and when a marriage abroad is recognized by the respective Schengen country was discussed. Most of the MS require the marriage to be registered either in the Embassy or the MS home registry. But for some countries (DE) the marriage is valid and recognizable without registration in the Embassy/in country, if the requirements for both spouses are met and the marriage is conducted in accordance with local laws.

About insurances, EUDEL highlighted that MS are solely responsible for verifying whether the insurances presented by applicants are adequate under the terms of visa code. However, consulates can provide a "useful" list of insurance companies to applicants.

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. They still receive a proportion of incomplete applications but no MS have expressed a need to amend the list of supporting documents. This will be discussed next year.

3.3 Exchange of information

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

Compared to the previous year, 2017 visa applications increased by an average of + 9%. BE, CZ and HU (28%) saw the highest increase, while IT,FR and SE were the only three MS which saw a decrease in the number of visa applications (SE stopped issuing visa for LEB since May 2017). Across all MS, the average approval rate was 83 % (similar than last year). SE has the highest refusal rate at 29 %, followed by AT (26%) and HU has the lowest at 4 %, followed by DE (10%). The main reasons for refusal are lack of proper supporting papers and doubts regarding the purpose of the stay.

Visas issued for Iraqi nationals represented 11% of the total visas approved in 2017, making up 33% of all visas issued by AT and 21% for BE, in contrast with 2 % of total visas approved by HU and IT.

Concerning Syrian nationals, 7,8 % of all visas issued in Jordan were for them, and they made up 26% for NO, whereas they only constituted 0,4% for HU and CZ.

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

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 18 months. Eudel encouraged MS to participate about open public consultations on "Modernising the EU's common visa policy" and "Extending the VIS to include data on long stay visas and residence documents". Several MS were not aware of these consultations, stating having received anything from their capitals.

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 two years ago 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. During Ramadan, one can observe a high increase of applications.

Several Schengen partners expressed concerns on many travel agencies or translator companies.

5. Other issues

No further issues to report.

This report has been approved by the Local Schengen Cooperation group.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

25/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) KAZAKHSTAN 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

The Republic of Kazakhstan hosts Schengen Member States meetings (with Bulgaria and Romania as observers) in Astana. Twenty one MS have embassies, most with consular sections in the capital Astana and there are five consulates (DE, LT, HU, PL, FR) in Almaty, the former capital. The EU Delegation is located in Astana and coordinates the LSC meetings.

The circumstances in Kazakhstan for submitting visa applications include vast distances between towns and cities plus harsh climate conditions that create additional burden to applicants in winter time.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During the reporting period the LSC group in Astana held 6 regular meetings on the following dates: 8 February 2017, 26 April 2017, 4 October 2017, 6 December 2017, 15 February 2018 and 19 April 2018.

The LSC meetings are organised and chaired by the EU Delegation in Astana. The EU Delegation is also in charge of reporting and coordination of the follow-up steps when needed. In case they wish so, MS share the EU Delegation reports with their capitals. Representative of consulates from Almaty participate in LSC meetings.

The LSC group meeting are very well attended.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In Kazakhstan the Visa Code is well implemented in a coordinated and synchronised manner. The Code proved its relevance as a single unified legal instrument, helping to address effectively common problems raised in relation to the Schengen visa application process. No specific problems related to the application of Visa Code were reported. In Kazakhstan VIS has successfully been applied since 14 November 2013.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

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

No particular proposals to amend the existing list were raised.

3.3 Exchange of information

As agreed amongst MS, since July 2012, a table of visa statistics is sent by EU Delegation to MS in Astana and Almaty every month on the basis of information provided by embassies and consulates to the EU Delegation.

The LSC group discussed at length in three of its meetings an issue related to the issuance of visas for citizens possessing dual citizenship. It was suggested that the EU DEL will coordinate the preparation of a consolidated list of practices. The consolidated list then could be sent, if needed, by LSC group members to their HQs.

LSC group exchanged views on various practices such as issuance of LSC short and long term visas for the same individuals, issuance of visas when individuals possess two passports (national and diplomatic), etc.

LSC group discussed the issue related to advertisement in the Internet of the possibility to purchase or obtain Schengen residence permits. It was proposed to create a list of trusted tourist companies/agencies and share it amongst LSC group.

LSC group shared information about the request by Kazakhstan authorities to a number of EU MS for a visa free regime for holders of service passports.

The LSC group shares a list of insurance companies offering adequate TMI, prepared by WG on travel medical insurances.

3.4 Other initiatives taken in LSC

The EU DEL briefed LSC group on visa issues following meetings with Kazakhstan officials.

EU DEL informed LSC group on a regular basis on developments related to Kazakhstan's request for a Visa facilitation agreement. Once again the issue was raised by Kazakhstan at the EU-Kazakhstan JHA subcommittee, held in November 2017 in Astana. COM sent the first TAIEX mission to Kazakhstan in 2016 that has prepared its recommendations following the examination of Kazakhstan National Action Plan. In December 2017, Kazakhstan provided its Road Map focused on the ways to address these recommendations. At the last COCON working group 21 countries have supported the Visa facilitation agreement with Kazakhstan. As a result, DG HOME was tasked to make a feasibility study, which is to be presented for the EU MS consideration in 2018. COM is considering to provide further assistance to the process by sending the second TAIEX mission to Kazakhstan.

4. Challenges in 2018-2019

In 2017-2018, the asylum seekers, in particular, teachers of the Turkish schools in Kazakhstan, to some EU MS were reported and this has to be closely followed. However, the risk of illegal migrants and asylum seekers in Europe is not increasing with the growing number of travellers from Kazakhstan in the reporting period.

5. Other issues: No other issues to report.



May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KENYA 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

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

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

The EU Delegation assumes with the rotating Presidency (Estonia for the second semester 2017 and Bulgaria for the second semester – both non represented in Nairobi) the role of convening and chairing plenary LSC meetings on a monthly basis.

Some of the representations (Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Italy and United Kingdom) use the services of Visa Facility Service (VFS) while Belgium and Spain outsource services from TLS and BLS respectively. Finland will start to use VFS in June 2018 and Italy published a tender to select an outsourcing company due to expiration of the previous contract. Portugal issues visas in Kenya through the Embassy of Greece.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

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.

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 2017 – March 2018

A list of agreed Local Insurance Companies is systematically maintained every month and published when updated on the EUD website and the MS websites. DK detected several cases of fake Insurance Certificates, which led to other MS also discovering cases from the same insurance company. The MS decided to suspend temporarily the concerned company from the list for further investigation, and to implement mitigation measures.

Other insurance companies were targeted by the fraudsters. The companies were systematically invited at EUDel in the presence of two or three EU MS to exchange views about the fraud and the way forward to avoid it.

EUDel invited also with the same set up as above the national regulatory authority to inform them about the cases our EU MS were recently facing. EUDel was explained the measures the regulatory authority had put in place. Until now, insurance fraud occurrences have stopped.

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 and EUMS started to revise the list in September 2017. At the time of writing, the revision is almost finished and will be presented to Central Visa Committee.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

For the moment, there is no specific discussion about harmonisation of practices. To have such a discussion on regular basis has however been requested by some of the representations.

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

FRONTEX organised a seminar about document fraud. It was welcome by the EU MS who found the course very interesting and helpful in their daily life. There was also a presentation of the FRONTEX activities and future developments.

This meeting was followed the week after by a Schengen meeting where the three Immigration Liaison Officers (NL, CH and HU) were invited to make a presentation on the situation prevailing in Nairobi about document frauds, human trafficking and other issues.

4. Challenges

1. VIS-mail is still not functioning for many EUMS. As using VIS-mail for transmitting information in the VIS is mandatory, this is a challenge as some EUMS are forced to breach the VIS codex in order to exchange information necessary for assessing visa applications.

5. Other issues

No specific issue to mention.



EUROPEAN UNION

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

18 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in KOSOVO 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Kosovo hosts 18 EU Member States. Schengen visas in Kosovo are issued by Switzerland (issuing Schengen visas on behalf of Austria, Belgium, France, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands); Norway (issues Schengen visa on behalf of Denmark, Iceland and Lithuania; Italy (representing Estonia), Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, Germany, Finland and Slovenia (issues short stay visas for Latvia). 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 and falsification of supporting documents are also reported. As a result, some consulates experience daily overload, and some report absence of applicants in the scheduled appointments. Some EU Member States and Schengen participants started to use external service provider (VFS Global) and visas are processed through the Visa Centre in Pristina.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

From April 2017 to March 2018, four LSC meetings took place on 6 April 2017, 19 October 2017, 11 December 2017 and 13 March 2018. The meetings were convened by the European Union 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. In the December 2017 meeting, the EU Office invited as a guest speaker the Director (VFS Global) of the Visa Centre in Pristina to make a presentation on the first half a year of the functioning of the Visa Centre and to share the experience of visa application processing through external provider in Pristina. Given Kosovo's small size, it is sufficient to coordinate LSC in meetings in Pristina, where all the Embassies are located.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

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). The average waiting period has increased and is on average around 3-3.5 months. It might currently take an applicant around 4 months to obtain Schengen visa, while at the same time Visa code stipulates that you cannot apply for visa 3-month prior to your trip.

Some Schengen states started to use external service provider (VFS-Visa Centre) to meet the Visa Code deadlines and provide better services to the applicant. Although it increases the cost of the visa through a service fee, the visa requests have almost tripled and refusal rate increased. The main challenge as reported by the Embassies using outsourcing is the increase in visa shopping, given the long waiting periods in other consulates some people turn to the Visa Centre even though their main destination might be different from the countries that serves the Visa Centre which in turn has impact on rising refusal rate.

Member States and Schengen participants also reported a relatively high abuse of Schengen visas, where applicants did not go to the country which issued the visa but to another. There are also challenges with an abuse of the visa appointment booking system, reportedly by travel agencies, who then sell the places to the applicants.

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.

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. Last year the EU once again shared the harmonised list based on request of some Member States and from the discussion and responses in the four LSC meetings, the harmonised list of documents is being used. There was no request made to amend the existing list during the reporting period.

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. Current practice of differentiated visa fees, even as regards children is one of the factors that contribute to visa shopping. Given the continued lack of visa liberalisation and general politicisation of the visa's issue in Kosovo, it was argued that touching the visa fee would be highly political decision in the current context that would need to be taken at both Capital and Brussels level. If the visa free regime is not granted to Kosovo next year, there could be an opportunity to harmonise the visa fee for Kosovo. 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. Overall the practice of sharing monthly visa statistics has improved since last year. The EU/EUSR Office reminded the EU Member States/Schengen participants issuing visas on behalf of some 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 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.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In the December 2017 LSC meeting, the EU Office invited as a guest speaker the Director (VFS Global) of the Visa Centre in Pristina to make a presentation on the first half a year of the functioning of the Visa Centre and to share the experience on visa application processing through external provider in Pristina. The meeting was appreciated by all the participants and lively exchange of views on the main advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing visa application in Kosovo's context took place.

4. Challenges

Given the delay in the visa liberalisation process, mainly due to long political stalemate over the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro (finally ratified on 22 March 2018), 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 until the visa free regime is granted, probably sometime next year depending on the progress in the last remaining visa liberalisation requirement related to fight against organized crime and corruption. In the meanwhile, some Member States already turned to outsourcing of the visa application process to address the challenge and shared such experience with others who might follow the course.

Most participants reported about the challenge of intermediaries mainly Travel Agencies, who built business schemes around the visa application process and continuously misinform people. The travel agencies also abuse the online booking system by booking all the slots that are later sold for extra fee to their clients.

The challenge in Kosovo also remains the use of falsified supporting documents, bank accounts, TATIM and Trusty documents or fake transactions for the visa fee.

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.

It is clear that many of the current LSC challenges will be tackled by the introduction of the visa free regime, which might in turn bring new challenges.



UNION EUROPÉENNE

DÉLÉGATION A MADAGASCAR

08/11/2017

COOPERATION LOCALE SCHENGEN (LSC) A MADAGASCAR RAPPORT¹ 2016-2017

1. Introduction

Deux Etats membres de l'UE sont présents à Antananarivo : l'Allemagne, la France. Deux autres Etats associés sont également représentés : la Suisse et la Norvège. Depuis 2012, seuls la France et la Suisse assurent la représentation Schengen et délivrent à ce titre des visas Schengen.

La répartition de la représentation Schengen entre ces deux Etats à Antananarivo est la suivante :

France:

21.769 demandes de visas ont été traitées par l'Ambassade de France en 2016 (22.149 en 2015), y compris visas pour DOM, CTOM, pays africains représentés ou visas de long séjour pour la France, dont 16.198 délivrés.

S'agissant spécifiquement des demandes de visas Schengen, 2156 visa ont été délivrés en représentation et 334 ont été refusés en 2016.

En 2017, 17.762 demandes ont été reçues au total, dont 13.495 visas délivrés au 30 septembre.

La France représente les Etats Schengen suivants :

- Antérieurement en 2011 : Espagne, Italie, Grèce, Portugal, Slovaquie
- Depuis le 1^{er} décembre 2011 : Belgique
- Depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2012 : Allemagne (pour les ressortissants malgaches), Autriche, Luxembourg
- Depuis 2016 : Islande

Les prises de rendez-vous et le dépôt de dossier pour les titulaires de passeports ordinaires sont externalisées depuis le 27 avril 2016 et déléguées au prestataire "TLS contact" avec l'objectif de délivrer plus rapidement les visas et dans les meilleures conditions, soit 48 heures après dépôt des dossiers. Pour les titulaires de passeports diplomatiques et de service, les modalités de dépôt des demandes de visa restent inchangées et se déroulent à la chancellerie de l'ambassade. Le rendez-vous est obligatoire. Depuis novembre 2014, les demandes de visas des titulaires de passeports officiels (diplomatiques et de service) suivent la même procédure avec appel à un numéro dédié (087007).

¹ Avril 2014 - Mars 2015

Suisse

S'agissant uniquement des demandes de visa Schengen, 700 demandes ont été traitées sur l'année 2016, dont 276 visas délivrés en représentation et 118 visas refusés.

De Janvier à Septembre 2017, 498 demandes de visas Schengen ont été enregistrées, dont 162 délivrées et 90 visas refusées.

Le dépôt des demandes de visa se fait en principe sur rendez-vous (sans frais) depuis le site internet ci-après : www.swiss-visa.ch. Ce site internet offre également aux demandeurs la possibilité de faire leur demande en ligne.

La présence personnelle n'est plus requise pour les demandeurs dont les données biométriques ont été déjà recueillies – titulaires de visas délivrés avec la mention « VIS », ainsi que pour les enfants de moins de 12 ans. Si les empreintes digitales recueillies précédemment se révèlent être de qualité insuffisante, l'Ambassade de Suisse se réserve le droit de convoquer le demandeur pour une nouvelle prise, de même si un entretien est jugé nécessaire.

L'Ambassade de Suisse a repris la représentation des pays suivants :

- Norvège
- Suède
- Pays-Bas
- Pologne
- Hongrie

Le VIS (Visa Information System) est opérationnel depuis le 6 juin 2013.

La coopération est encouragée et des réunions sont organisées par la Délégation de l'UE avec la France et la Suisse.

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2016-2017

Des réunions spécifiquement consacrées à la coopération locale Schengen ont été organisées le 18 août 2016 et le 25 octobre 2017. En août 2016, le groupe a visité le nouveau centre de traitement de visa Schengen et de long séjour, émis par le consulat général de France, et a pu s'assurer de son bon fonctionnement. Le centre est opéré par TLS et prend aussi en charge les applications visas pour le Royaume Uni. A ce jour, le consulat français continue à exprimer sa satisfaction du travail de TLS ayant significativement réduit le nombre des candidats attendant devant le consulat. TLS prend en charge les dossiers avant l'examen et la décision du consulat.

Lors de la réunion d'octobre 2017, la Délégation a informé sur les efforts de la Commission européenne, de préserver et de renforcer l'espace Schengen, sur les bases de la communiqué de presse², ainsi que sur les travaux en cours sur la révision de la base légale du VIS. La Délégation a encouragé les partis concernés de participer aux consultations en cours et a partagé les liens y afférents:

² MEMO/17/3408; Questions & Answers: Preserving and strengthening the Schengen area
IP/17/3047: State of the Union: Preserving and strengthening Schengen to improve security and safeguard Europe's freedoms

- sur la réduction d'âge des personnes dont les *emprunts digitales* sont enregistrés: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/consultation-lowering-fingerprinting-age-children-visa-procedure-12-years-6-years_en).
- sur la création d'un dépôt/stockage pour les *visas de long séjour* et des documents de résidence, ajoutant que l'étude est disponible sur https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-information-system_en. La Délégation a informé que la consultation sur ce sujet sera ouverte bientôt et le lien sera communiqué dès que possible.

Les rapports de réunions sont établis en coopération entre la délégation de l'UE, l'Ambassade de Suisse et le Consulat Général de France.

La coordination n'est pas assurée en dehors d'Antananarivo car les deux services chargés de l'émission de visas centralisent leurs activités à Antananarivo

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

La Délégation informe régulièrement les Etats concernés de l'évolution des travaux, activités et instructions reçus de Bruxelles et transmis par la DG HOME de la Commission européenne (et autres services pour les autres sujets couverts par la coopération locale).

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

Seuls deux Etats sont actifs dans ce domaine. Le Consulat Général de France annonce les changements du taux consulaire à l'Ambassade de Suisse qui modifie en conséquence les frais de visa. La liste des pièces justificatives demandées est échangée pour harmonisation régulièrement. L'harmonisation semble suffisamment réalisée.

Les deux Etats Schengen demandent des documents qui leur permettent de justifier le motif du voyage, les ressources financières, l'hébergement, l'assurance,

En ce qui concerne l'Ambassade de Suisse, les actes d'état civil ne sont pas requis. L'Ambassade se réserve toutefois le droit d'exiger d'autres justificatifs, notamment des copies d'acte d'état civil, si elle le juge nécessaire. Les justificatifs concernant l'hôte (preuve des moyens financiers) sont envoyés par email ou par fax directement à l'Ambassade.

En ce qui concerne le Consulat Général de France, les actes d'état civil sont systématiquement requis (livret de famille pour les personnes mariées). Les attestations d'hébergement ne sont pas suffisantes, les vérifications des ressources et du nombre d'occupants du logement de l'hébergeant par les mairies n'étant pas toujours probantes.

3.3 Echange d'informations

Les statistiques sont communiquées régulièrement entre la Suisse, la France et l'UE. La France et la Suisse se consultent sur les dossiers individuels (sur les demandes de visas de personnes de nationalité comorienne, par exemple). La collaboration est très bonne et très rapide.

Dans la mesure où seuls deux Etats sont concernés, une coordination informelle s'opère par échanges directs entre les deux services concernés pour autant que si besoin. Cette coordination informelle fonctionne bien.

Le Consulat de France continue à constater des cas de fraude sur les visas Schengen concernant en particulier les relevés bancaires et les attestations de travail. Face à ce phénomène, le Consulat de France a renforcé la vérification des documents reçus.

En 2016, le nouveau passeport biométrique est émis par les autorités malgaches depuis décembre 2013. Il est le seul accepté par ces autorités depuis le 1^{er} janvier 2015.

Depuis le 1er janvier 2015, les autorités malgaches ne reconnaissent plus le passeport biométrique délivré avant décembre 2013. Par conséquent, les demandes de visa ne pourront être déposées qu'avec le nouveau modèle de passeport électronique.

Un passager avec un visa à entrées multiples encore valable sur l'ancien passeport, peut continuer de voyager avec ce visa jusqu'à la fin de sa validité, il faudra simplement voyager avec les deux passeports.

4. Défis pour 2016-2017

Les deux Etats concernés continueront à assurer la mise en œuvre des règles relatives aux visas Schengen en coopération avec la Délégation de l'UE. Des améliorations éventuelles de la coopération seront examinées pour autant que de besoin.

En 2016, le Consulat de France a pour objectif de délivrer un maximum de visas à entrées multiples.

En 2017, un projet du Consulat de France est en cours d'études. Un projet dont l'objectif est de faciliter les demandes de visas à Tamatave (les regroupant une fois/semaine et les acheminant au Consulat à Antananarivo) dans la région Est de Madagascar, où les demandes sont plus nombreuses que dans d'autres régions.

Les dossiers pourront être déposés au Consulat de Tamatave, reçus et vérifiés par TLS contact, ensuite envoyés pour être traités au Consulat de France d'Antananarivo. Les demandeurs pourront récupérer leurs visas une semaine après le dépôt des dossiers.

5. Divers

L'Ambassade de Suisse est également accréditée aux Comores et aux Seychelles. Elle est représentée par l'Ambassade de France à Moroni en matière de visa Schengen.

Ce rapport finalisé par la Délégation de l'UE a été établi en étroite collaboration et avec la contribution des deux Etats Schengen directement concernés: France et Suisse. La Norvège et les deux autres Etats membres de l'UE présents à Madagascar ont été tenus informés.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MEXICO

Mexico City 17 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Mexico City (MEXICO) 2017-2018 REPORT³

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 LSC group in Mexico consists of 22 members:

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)
22. **EU Delegation** (chair)

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

In the reporting period three regular LSC meetings were held in Mexico City. Meetings were very well attended. The LSC group always met at the EU Delegation. The meetings were chaired by the EU DEL (with minutes and follow up dealt with by the chair). MS do not draft their own minutes, but some of them forward LSC meeting reports to their capitals.

³ April 2016 – March 2017

Outside the capital city, only Spain has professional consular representations (General Consulates) in Guadalajara (State of Jalisco) and Monterrey (State of Nuevo León), therefore there are no additional regional LSC groups in Mexico.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

VIS is fully operational in Mexico. Consuls do not tend to use VIS Mail frequently.

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. 150 Schengen visas per year (refusal rate max. 2%), with the special case of ES issuing over 200 Schengen visas throughout last year (with a refusal rate of ca. 10%). Medium/smaller MSs do not issue more than 40 Schengen visas annually.

As far as the cost of Schengen visas, 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 2017 the LSC group Mexico continued its work on the harmonised list of supporting documents for short-stay visas. A draft list was agreed upon and forwarded to DG Home in October 2017 and comments from the Visa Committee were received in March 2018. LSC Mexico will discuss the VC remarks at the next LSC meeting in May 2018 and prepare a reply.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As far as multiple entry visas (MEVs), many MS have different regulations and practices concerning the length of validity of Schengen visas (some may only issue 1-year MEVs, while others tend to issue MEVs with longer validity). To the question whether a harmonisation of practices in this regard was useful, some MS opined that such an exercise would not have much added value in Mexico, where the number of Schengen visas issued each year is limited.

3.4 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, including statistics, tips (e.g. on best/worst insurance companies), warnings etc. Schengen Consuls cooperate well via informal contacts (email, phone and what's app group). There were no reports of attempted visa frauds at the Schengen Consulates in Mexico in the past year.

According to shared statistics, most applicants for Schengen visas in Mexico came from Ecuador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Bolivia; and there have also been some nationals of African and Asian countries (India, Russia, China, Nigeria, and Morocco).

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

n/a

4. Challenges

The treatment of EU nationals entering Mexico in general terms was good in the last year, although there were also reports of EU travellers denied entry (Mexican authorities at times did not even reveal motives for such refusals, but these could include: "an alert issued by the US authorities" or "not fulfilling migratory requirements" (be it due to expired passports or not passing the migratory interview on arrival for any other reason). Some Consuls raised concerns about the treatment of EU nationals denied entry (who were being held for hours in a small room, without access to food or water, without any information or contact with an Embassy/Consulate, before being put back on a plane to Europe). However, in general it can be stated that MEX authorities comply with the VWA.

5. Other issues

Since July 2016 Mexico has been applying a unilateral change of its 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 enough, the United Kingdom was also included in the scope of this new policy, while the Republic of Ireland was not.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION TO MONTENEGRO

Podgorica, 30 April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MONTENEGRO 2017-2018 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 6 Honorary Consuls representing 8 countries (DK/SE, BE/LU, MT, BG, SL, HU) 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 turn the consular function of issuing "Schengen visas C" to the Common Application Centre Podgorica (CAC) which works within the 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 Consular Correspondent.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

At first meeting held on 24/05/2017, participants shared the statistics of issued/refused visas for 2016 which was as following:

Since January 2017, the CAC issued 151 visas and refused 2 visas; German embassy will send the statistics but so far, did not have any asylum seekers or refugees; Italian embassy issued 94 Schengen visas and approx. 13 long-term visas (slight increase comparing to the last year) and 2 visas were refused (slight decrease from the last year); Greek embassy issued 25 visas and no refused visas; Romanian embassy issued 5 long-term and 4 short-term visas.

Total number of issued visas by the CAC, Greek, German and Italian embassies is 1095 and the total number of refused visas is 165. The total number of issued visas by observers' countries (Romania and Bulgaria) is 442 and no refused visas.

Other issues covered were: Visa code - List of harmonized documents.

At the second meeting held on 05/12/2017, participants shared their experiences in visa issuance/refusals as following:

German Embassy: the number of long term visas issued to Montenegrin citizens is slowly rising as they are allowed to work in Germany. Schengen short term visas are issued mainly to Russians, Turks and some Montenegrins who over-stayed in the Schengen zone but had to go back to Germany (i.e. to complete medical treatment, language course).

Visas were denied to some Turkish citizens seen as potential asylum seekers.

Slovenian Embassy: the number of issued visas is constantly rising. The biggest number of visas was issued to Russians. The remaining visas were mainly issued to Serbians, Kosovars, Chinese, Filipinos, Cameroonians, and Egyptians. Less Ukrainians than in previous years asked for visas. Visas are mostly issued for tourism, transit, business, sport, medical treatment etc. In November, the CAC issued 86 visas.

Greek Embassy: 73 Schengen visas were issued, mainly to Russians, Ukrainians, Serbian, Turkish, Filipinos, Belarusians, Cameroonians and Kazahstanians. The Embassy also issued 23 national visas for work, humanitarian reasons, education, and sport.

For the Slovakian Embassy, the CAC is issuing visas and there were only four visas issued to Russians travelling to Slovakia.

The Italian embassy issued 400 visas, of which 110 were long term visas, mainly for sport, education and medical reasons and around 300 were Schengen visas issued mainly to Russians, Chinese, Turks, and Montenegrins (D visas).

The Austrian Embassy does not issue visas but they had eight cases of Montenegrins who were caught in Austria for illegal work or crime for which they had to be deported to Montenegro. There have also been attempts to travel back to Austria despite an ongoing long term travel ban.

Observers

The Bulgarian Embassy issued less than 300 visas. Applicants were mostly Russians, Ukrainians, Turks and Chinese. Fewer visas for Ukrainians were issued compared to last year, due to biometric passports which they started to use this summer.

The Romanian Embassy reported on a decrease in issuing short term visas which were mainly issued for transit purposes to Russians and Ukrainians with residence permit in Montenegro. In exceptional cases, the Embassy issued transit visas with only one entry for a maximum of 5 days. There is an increase in visas issued for sport-related reasons

The Chair reminded on the ongoing public consultation related to the initiative to extend the VIS to include data on long stay visas and residence documents and asked colleagues to participate in the consultative work. The consultation is open until 9 February 2018.

Total number of issued/refused Schengen visas in 2017 was:

	Issued visas	Refused visas
The Common Application Centre (CAC)	556	3
Italian embassy	259	6
Germany	1570	289
Greece	95	5

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code has been thoroughly discussed during the Local Schengen meetings.

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

The list of supporting visa documents should be in line with the requirements stated in the *Handbook for the processing of visa applications (article 4.3. to 4.6)* and the participants were asked to check their lists for possible differences and eventually to harmonize them.

Lists of supporting documents received from the CAC, German, Greek and Italian embassies were sent to DG Home as requested.

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 to the EUMS about all these subjects every month.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Participants expressed interest in having another joint training, similar to the one we had last year on the "Detection of falsified documents", which was organized by FRONTEX and the EUD.

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.



UNION EUROPEENNE

DELEGATION AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC

**COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN
ENTRE LES CONSULATS ET LES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC)
AUPRES DU ROYAUME DU MAROC
RAPPORT¹ 2017-2018**

1. Introduction

17 Etats membres de l'espace Schengen ont une présence diplomatique/consulaire au Maroc: AT (Rabat), BE (Rabat, Casablanca), CH (Rabat), CZ (Rabat), DE (Rabat), DK (Rabat), EL (Rabat, Casablanca), ES (Agadir, Casablanca, Nador, Rabat, Tanger et Tétouan), FI (Rabat), FR (Agadir, Casablanca, Fès, Marrakech, Rabat et Tanger), HU (Rabat), IT (Rabat, Casablanca), NL (Rabat), NO (Rabat), PL (Rabat), PT (Rabat), SE (Rabat).

Accords de représentation pour les questions de visa: AT, BE, DK², SE, IT représentent respectivement SK, LU, NO, IS, MT. DE représente SI et LT.³

Recours aux prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visa: AT, HR, NL, PT et SE utilisent les services de VFS Global; DE, BE, DK/NO, FR, IT et NL utilisent les services de TLS Contact; ES fait recours aux services du prestataire BLS.

Spécificités locales relatives à la délivrance de visas:

- Le Maroc est le 8^{ème} pays au monde par rapport au nombre de demandes de visa Schengen déposées en 2017, avec **614432 demandes** (contre 555142 en 2016), c'est-à-dire un **taux de croissance de 10.7%**, parmi les plus importants dans le monde. **513643 visas uniformes** ont été effectivement délivrés en 2017 - dont 295497 par FR (57.52% du total), 158734 par ES (30.9%), 15562 par NL (3.02%), 15156 par IT (2.95%), 12791 par DE (2.49%). Le taux de refus enregistré en 2017 a été de 15.3% (contre 13.1% en 2016)⁴.

- Dans le cas de certains consulats, **les délais de rendez-vous peuvent atteindre pendant la haute saison 45 jours**. La plupart des Etats membres offre cependant des rendez-vous en régime d'urgence pour les demandes considérées prioritaires (missions, hommes d'affaires, urgences etc.).

- **De nombreuses tentatives de fraude**, notamment la falsification des justificatifs relatifs à la situation socio-professionnelle (attestations de travail) et financière (relevés de compte bancaire) des demandeurs de visa, mais aussi des cas **de mariage suspect** (mariages "blancs" ou "gris") avec des ressortissants UE.

- **221045 visas à entrées multiples (MEV)** ont été délivrés en 2017 au Maroc, représentant 43% du nombre total de visas délivrés. Les consulats des Etats membres au Maroc délivrent le plus souvent des MEV avec une durée de 6 mois, 1 an et 2 ans. Les MEV de 3, 4 et 5 ans sont délivrés moins fréquemment.

¹ Avril 2017 - Mars 2018

² DK reçoit et traite également les demandes de visa des ressortissants mauritaniens et tunisiens.

³ En cas d'opinion négative DE contacte les deux pays en question qui renvoient le dossier et émettent le cas échéant le refus officiel.

⁴ Selon les statistiques visa pour l'année 2017, publiées par DG HOME (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm#stats)

2. Réunions LSC organisées en 2017-2018

La coordination des réunions LSC est assurée par la Délégation de l'UE au Maroc.

Deux réunions ordinaires ont été organisées dans la période de référence (en octobre 2017 et janvier 2018). La participation des Etats membres représentés au Maroc aux réunions est nombreuse. 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 sont établis par la Délégation de l'UE et partagés avec les missions diplomatiques des Etats membres. Les Etats membres communiquent les rapports à leurs capitales.

Les consulats des Etats membres en dehors de Rabat sont invités systématiquement aux réunions. Ils reçoivent les rapports et les conclusions des réunions LSC à travers leurs missions diplomatiques à Rabat.

3. Etat des lieux

3.1 Application du Code des Visas

Les missions diplomatiques des 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 mise en œuvre de la Décision d'exécution de la Commission C(2015)6940;
- 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;
- le fonctionnement du système VIS et du VISMail, les délais de rendez-vous et de décision relative à la demande ;
- l'analyse du risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité;
- l'application de la Directive 2004/38/CE (relative au droit des citoyens de l'Union et des membres de leurs familles de circuler et de séjourner librement sur le territoire des États membres), y compris dans le cas des enfants qui font l'objet d'une procédure "kafala";
- les signalements dans le système SIS, d'autres échanges d'informations (signalements/ alertes) entre les consulats concernant les demandeurs de visa, la protection des données personnelles des demandeurs de visa;
- la relation avec les prestataires de service extérieurs pour la réception des demandes de visas.

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

Les discussions au sein de LSC ont indiqué le besoin d'une révision/mise à jour de la liste des documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa au Maroc, établie par la **Décision d'exécution de la Commission C(2015)6940**. Plusieurs membres de LSC estiment que la liste actuelle s'avère insuffisante pour une décision argumentée, les consulats en question sollicitant des documents supplémentaires afin d'évaluer la demande. La mise en œuvre de la Décision diffère parfois au sein du même consulat ou des consulats du même pays. Les consultations en vue d'une révision de la liste harmonisée de justificatifs sont en cours.

3.3 Echange d'informations

L'échange d'informations entre les membres de LSC se déroule à l'occasion des réunions de coordination et/ou via e-mail. Les membres de LSC échangent régulièrement et/ou ad-hoc, en fonction des besoins, des informations statistiques sur les visas délivrés/ refusés, les cas ou les suspicions de fraude et d'utilisation de faux documents, le fonctionnement du système VIS, les articles de presse concernant la problématique Schengen. Il apparaît utile d'établir un système par rotation pour la compilation des statistiques visa échangées localement.

Utilisation du VISMail: Le système reste très peu utilisé par les membres de LSC, pour différentes raisons. Premièrement, pas toutes les représentations Schengen ont accès à VISMail. Deuxièmement, certains consulats estiment que le système est peu fiable, car difficilement accessible et sans confirmation de réception du courriel. Néanmoins, un nombre réduit de consulats utilisent le VISMail, notamment pour la correspondance avec la police des frontières de certains États membres ainsi que pour solliciter des informations sur les refus de demandes de visa par les autres consulats.

3.4 D'autres initiatives

A l'initiative des Etats membres, **2 réunions consacrées à la fraude documentaire** ont eu lieu dans la période de référence (en septembre 2017, organisée à Rabat par FI, DK, NO et SE; en mars 2018, organisée à Casablanca par BE). Ces réunions, très appréciées par les participants, ont été élargies à d'autres partenaires non-Schengen ou non-UE (US, CA, AU, DO, CO, MX). La thématique abordée (la fraude documentaire dans le domaine des visas, les mariages "blancs", l'analyse du risque en matière d'immigration et de sécurité, le phénomène de « visa shopping », l'utilisation du système VIS) est souvent similaire à celle des réunions Schengen.

4. Défis

Points à traiter au cours du prochain exercice (2018-2019)

- Réviser la liste des documents justificatifs devant être produits par les demandeurs de visa au Maroc, afin d'assurer une mise en œuvre cohérente et non discriminatoire du Code des Visas;
- 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;
- Echanger sur les meilleures pratiques en termes de réaction aux cas de **fraude documentaire/visa**.
- Développer le dialogue technique avec les autorités marocaines et les autres institutions d'intérêt pour l'activité de LSC (banques, sociétés de transport international, d'assurances etc.).
- Améliorer la coordination locale en dehors de la capitale (renforcer la participation des consulats concernés aux réunions LSC, organiser une réunion de coordination dans un consulat en dehors de la capitale).

5. Divers

Le rapport a été approuvé par tous les États membres présents au Maroc.



April 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) MOZAMBIQUE 2017-2018 REPORT⁵

1. Introduction

Of the 12 EU resident Member States Embassies in Maputo, capital of the Republic of Mozambique, 8 of them: **DE, ES, FR, IT, NL, PT, FI, and NO** are issuing Schengen visas for a total of 22 Schengen MS (out of the 26).

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) Group in Mozambique is composed of Schengen visa issuing MS and SE now represented by FR for visa issuing. Following the closure of DK Embassy, the following changes in the local representation for visa issuance occurred: DK is now represented by NL; SE; EE is represented by PT; NO started to issue visas; IS Schengen visa issuance is ensured by FI.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The LSC continued to meet and articulate Schengen relevant issues. 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).

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. Harmonisation of practice is thus acquired. During the reporting period no amendments were deemed necessary by the LSC. Nevertheless the LSC has further considered the list would require a review in 2018 which is identified in the section 4 of this report.

⁵ April 2017 – March 2018.

3.3. New harmonization of practices

No particular additional measure of harmonisation of practices is being taken in addition to what is in place.

The average length of validity of MEVs is difficult to assess as breakdown of statistics of some MS do not include the length. One member state would roughly estimate that the average length of MEVs issued is of one year.

3.4. 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

As regards challenges of the previous reporting period, it should be acknowledged that Mozambican authorities have officially shared the updated list and one set of specimens of Mozambican travel documents where a visa sticker may be stamped with the EUD. The sharing of other sets with MS continues to be a challenge.

For the year ahead, LSC will continue to strive for early notice and information by the Mozambican authorities on the implementation details of their legislation as regards visa issuing at borders, as well as reinforcing overall internal coordination, including through meetings of the Group with the competent authorities. LSC has also identified as a task for 2018 the revision of the list of supporting documents that dates from 2014.

5. Other issues

No other issues to address.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in NIGERIA 2017-2018 REPORT¹

1. Introduction

Key issues on the location and number of Member States (MS) and non-MS issuing Schengen visas are as follows (see Annex 1 for details):

- Schengen visas are issued in both Abuja and Lagos;
- in Abuja there are eighteen Schengen States (sixteen MS and two non-MS) of which sixteen issue visas (fourteen MS and the two non-MS); and
- in Lagos there are seven Schengen States Consulate Generals (or similar) (six MS and one non-MS), of which four issue visas (all MS).

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Ten LSC meetings were held in the year 2017-2018, six in Abuja, and one in Lagos, and one joint meeting/workshop of staff from Abuja and Lagos.

1. 22nd April 2017 (Workshop - Abuja and Lagos LSC and ILO staff)
2. 12th May 2017
3. 5th July 2017
4. 29th August 2017 (with MFA on Visa Issues)
5. 8th September 2017
6. 5th October 2017 (Lagos)
7. 27th October 2017
8. 8th December 2017
9. 27th February 2018 (including with MFA on Visa Issues)

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 and participate in most meetings. Key issues have been enhancing coordination with Immigration Liaison Officers (most noticeably in Lagos), improving exchanges with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and exploring work that might link administrative assessment of visa applications with action on anti-trafficking.

The meetings in Lagos were less frequent than in previous years, because of the coordination which took place under the joint workshop (22nd April 2017), and the postponement of a meeting initially planned for the end of the year in Lagos.

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.

¹ April 2017 – March 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen Area States (States) and the EUD both carry out the tasks mentioned in the visa code. During 2017-2018 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 staff, which are now responsible for just under 60% of the Schengen visas issued; notably with the Immigration Liaison Officers, which in Lagos have sent up their own LION team (Lagos Immigration 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))*: The 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 (see Annex 1 for the current situation).
- *Monthly Statistics (Art 48(3)(a))*: The collection of statistics in an agreed format has taken place every quarter. Improvements in the timely distribution of the information have been made.
- *Assessment of migratory and/or security risks (Art 48(3)(b))*: The general security matters are usually discussed in other fora. These matters have been raised in discussions but no systematic collection of information has been initiated. However, most Schengen States report an increase in the number of their visa staff to address what is seen as a higher than normal migratory risk from Nigeria.
- *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, and the revised table from the information supplied by Member States was circulated at the 8th September 2017 meeting.

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, but Schengen States consider that harmonised practices are already taking place. All States mention that they are using the list, but have in LSC meeting identified a number of issues: (i) should be clear that these are minimum requirements; (ii) sometimes not clear what is needed, for example, what is meant by "proof of employment"; (iii) the list does not determine how you act on the information – in some cases States will refuse a visa if there is no proof of accommodation; for other States this is not the case; (iv) visa shopping still taking place – even between Lagos and Abuja; (v) No reference to Travel Medical Insurance is included in the list.

It has also been noted following discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that no particular distinction is made for diplomatic or official (service) passports; instead a distinction is made for applicants travelling on “official mission or official purposes” (section 7 of the Implementing Decision).

Nevertheless, no amendments have been proposed to the harmonised list. There has also been no request to carry out a review of this harmonised list.

3.3 Harmonisation of Practices

Harmonisation of Practices takes place through a number of mechanisms, namely:

- *harmonised list of supporting documents*: this list is used by all States (see above);
- *Common Information Sheet/Frequently Asked Questions*: this list is used with mixed success (see Annex 1);
- *reducing the number of Limited Territorial Visas*: the sharing of information on visa statistics has encouraged an approach in which best efforts are used to limit the number of LTVs issued (the use of LTVs being seen as a way of avoiding the Schengen system);
- *harmonisation of information in the Visa Information System*: there have been some discussions on the information included in the VIS with some states stating that they cannot see all the available information, whilst others stating that this information is in their system. It was concluded that these differences arose from the different “delegations” or “authorities” provided by the different HQ, and that each mission should address this matter through their own respective HQ;
- *what do you do with false documents?*: there has been much discussion about what to do with false documents, such as passports, or passport that contain false visas. States tend to have different approaches – retaining the document, returning to the person who presented the document, transmitting to the Nigeria Immigration Service, or placing in the hands of the law enforcement authorities. Elements of a harmonised approach would include clarifying that documents should be removed from circulation, and that this approach should be agreed with the Nigerian authorities, including NIS. Further discussion between States is required before agreeing any standard rules.
- *improving the use and treatment of Note Verbales from MFA*: two sessions of discussions have been held with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) which has attempted to harmonise the approach to the granting of visas for diplomatic, service, and normal Nigerian passports for those on official missions.

No attempt has been made to harmonise the approach to the issuing of Multiple-Entry Visas (MEVs).

3.4 Exchange of information

Exchange of information takes place in a number of areas. The following observations can be made:

- *pertinent issues*: regular exchange of information both through the LSC meetings and through a larger “anti-fraud” group meeting (involving non-EU Member States);

- *visa statistics*: these are examined on a quarterly basis through an agreed format which looks at visa applied for, issued, and denied (see above, section 3.1).
- *sensitive issues*: there has been some discussion of sensitive issues;
- *Travel Medical Insurance*: sharing of information has been carried out with latest table of companies used circulate in the minutes of the September 2018 meeting;
- *cost of Schengen visas*: exchange of information on the cost of Schengen Visas has continued with 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 1 contains information on the cost of Schengen visas for each State).
- *smuggling and trafficking*: there has been some exchange (most noticeably in the workshop of April 2017) about how to communicate with the Nigerian authorities when visa applicants are suspected to be involved in smuggling or trafficking.
- *Directive 2004/38*: the implementation of this Directive, which provides for the rights of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the Union, has been the subject of discussion because of concern that fraudulent applications have been made under this directive. Provisions for strengthened cooperation in this area have been made.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Initiatives that deserve mention include the following:

- *Meetings with the MFA*: there have been two meetings with the MFA which have addressed in particular concerns of the MFA on visa issues (courtesy, time...) and concerns of States on the use of Note Verbales for official missions.
- *LSC/ILO/Visa Workshop*: the first of what is hoped will become an annual event was held on 22nd May 2017 between visa officers and immigration liaison officers to explore topics such as documentary fraud in visa applications, the disruption of organised crime groups involved in visa fraud/trafficking, and cooperation with NAPTIP (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons) on anti-trafficking.
- *European Migration Liaison Officer (EMLO)*: the EMLO appointed to work in the EU Delegation has completed one year of service, contributing in particular to the area of anti-trafficking and police cooperation (Europol).
- *Regional Schengen Cooperation Officer (RSCO)*: a new RSCO (an initiative supported by NL, PT, and IT) took up his post based in Accra in November 2017, and has contributed to the meetings noticeably through the sharing of experiences from neighbouring countries, and reports quarterly on regional visa trends.
- *European Union Return Liaison Officer (EURLO)*: a new EURLO, financed by the EU, working full time in the Embassy of Finland took up their position in February 2018.

4. Challenges

In 2017-2018 the collection of visa statistics has improved, with the timely provision of data. Sharing of information on Travel Medical Insurance and the use of the Common Information Sheet/FAQ still poses some problems. Coordination with ILOs has improved, although there is still much to be done here in the light of the forthcoming directive. The quarterly reports from the RSCO (see above) are a useful addition to information for LSC staff, underlining the importance of the exchange of information.

Given the challenges of fraud and anti-trafficking in Nigeria, one major challenge is moving from an “administrative” approach to issuing visas to a more “pro-active” one in which, if there are good grounds for suspecting malpractice (fraud, trafficking...), the dossiers can be put in the hands of the law-enforcement agencies, such as NAPTIP. However, there is some uncertainty about legal responsibilities of visa staff in this area. In addition, the research needed to have 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 could be improved.

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					22,650	11,350	
2	BE	Yes + EE, LT, LU, NL	Yes – VfS	Yes					27,000	13,900	Rate set by Brussels
3	CZ	Yes	No	No					23,200	na	Change every month based on monthly exchange rate
4	DE	Yes – mainly government	No	Yes	DE	Yes	No	Yes	22,500	Na	€60 equivalent mentioned on website, updated according to exchange rate movements
5	DK	Yes	Yes - VfS	Yes	DK	No	na	na	25,490	12,750	
6	EL	Yes	No	No					27,000	na	
7	ES	Yes – mainly government	No	No	ES	Yes	Yes - BLS	No	25,200	6,500	
8	FI	Yes	No	Yes					20,400		Changes if price moves by more than 5%
9	FR	Yes	Yes - VfS	Yes	FR	Yes + NL, LT	Yes - VfS	Yes	22,556	10,000-12,000	VfS fees depend on service provided
10	HU	Yes	No	No					€60		€60 paid in euro
11	IT	Yes –mainly government/official	Yes: VfS then Lagos	No	IT	Yes + MT ^(vi)	Yes- VfS	No	22,750	9,040	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					22,000	na	Change the price every quarter if prices move more than 5% due to exchange rate changes
14	PT	Yes	Yes - VfS	Yes					23,045	11,520	
15	SK	No	na	na					na	Na	Change 3-4 times a year
16	SE	Yes + LV, SK	Yes - VfS	Yes		No	Yes - VfS		21,900	10,950	
17	CH	Yes	No	No	CH	No	No	No	25,200		N22,500 DHL charges for delivery; change due to exchange rate changes if greater than 5%
18	NO	Yes	Yes - VfS	Yes					€60	10,350	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) 2017-2018 REPORT⁵⁵

1. Introduction

In Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, the following Member States issue Schengen visas: Austria, Belgium (also representing Luxemburg), Czech Republic (also representing the Slovak Republic), Denmark (also representing Iceland), France, Germany (also representing Latvia and Slovenia), Greece, Hungary (also representing Lithuania and Estonia), Italy (also representing Malta), Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands (also representing Finland), Switzerland (also representing Liechtenstein) and Norway. Germany and Italy furthermore issue Schengen visas in Karachi through their respective Consulate General in that city.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Meetings were held on a monthly basis during the reporting period, except in August. Additional ad hoc meetings were held in relation to the work on harmonisation of supporting documents. The regular LSC meetings are well attended, with increased participation compared to the previous year (with the exception of two or three Member States whose presence was rarer), although the presence of all Member States has never been achieved at any given meeting. The meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation. Agendas and minutes prepared by the EU Delegation are promptly circulated. There is no formal LSC coordination outside Islamabad in Pakistan.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Schengen Member States missions are well equipped to apply the Visa Code, with often very seasoned officers in charge. About half of the missions rely on collection centres to receive visa applications in view of the number of applications and security considerations. One Member State relies on a regional centre for visa decisions. One Member State suspended issuance of visa on a temporary basis from December 2017 to February 2018.

However, staff is often overstretched in face of an increasing workload regarding Schengen visas in Pakistan, but also for many, Schengen visa applications from Afghanistan, not to mention national visas, where there is a growing uptake. This last point could signal a shift amongst visa applicants, avoiding the requirements in a Schengen visa application. This adds up to the necessary vigilance to be exerted in view of the context of generalised fraud. Fake and false documentation is most problematic. Missions keep on being confronted with imaginative fraudulent schemes. Interviews are conducted in a series of cases.

Out of 86553 visa applications received in total by all Schengen missions in 2017, 34 % were refused, with however some variations in the refusal rates (from 17% to 54%). In 2017, some 57300 Schengen visas were issued in Pakistan. 2017 was marked by a 21% increase in applications compared to 2016, with remarkable variations. Important increases (up to 65.3 % in one case) were noted for several countries, while substantial decreases were noted for others, implying potential “visa shopping”.

⁵⁵ April 2017 – March 2018

The EU Delegation has demonstrated its capacity to ensure the expected LSC tasks under the Visa Code.

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

Work on preparing a list of supporting documents has been a substantial part of the work of the LSC under the reporting period. The prepared list reflects the need to prevent fraud or illegal immigration. A first draft list was submitted to the Visa Committee for consideration on 4 October 2017. The Visa Committee appreciated the work done but made a series of comments that needed to be addressed. The LSC Islamabad therefore compiled a second version of the list taking the observations into consideration for review at the Visa Committee on 15 February 2018. A few additional comments were received from the Visa Committee and the revised list is expected be reviewed in May 2018.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

As mentioned in the previous Annual Report, there is no harmonised practice regarding issuance of Multiple Entry Visas (MEVs), and no systematic statistics for short term visas. However, the trend 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, the very few longest MEVs are issued 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

- cases of fraud and attempted fraudulent schemes, including exploitation of Directive 2004/38/EC;
- Pakistani visa fees, as there is a wide variety of amounts levied in Schengen zone by Pakistani Embassies, compared to the Schengen fees applied uniformly (followed up by a letter to the Foreign Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in July 2017);
- Pakistan's visa on arrival policy;
- Schengen fees collected locally (to assess potential discrepancies in local currency, although several missions collect fees in Euros);
- Additional services offered by a visa collection centre;
- travel medical insurance (TMI) companies and update of the list of approved companies;
- implementation of the Visa Information System;
- use of VIS Mail (not yet implemented by several missions);
- Statistics and trends in visa applications (including a detailed presentation and very well received made by MS);
- Relay of information on public consultations on modernisation of the EU visa policy;
- Issues regarding visa applications from Afghanistan;
- Information on Erasmus+ (to avoid difficulties when visas applications by recipients of Erasmus+ scholarships are submitted);
- Verification and legalisation of documents.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Fraud prevention is a cardinal element for Schengen Missions in Islamabad. Besides regular LSC, many Member States (LSC participants, and in some cases, Immigration Liaison Officers) attend on a regular basis the informal "Anti-Fraud Group" that gathers representatives of Schengen MS, other missions (such as non-Schengen EU MS, US, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Ukraine etc.), and forms a useful platform for exchange of information regarding fraud schemes and illegal migration routes. On 30 January, the Anti-Fraud Group was held at the Residence of the Head of Delegation, and steered by the LSC Chair.

The LSC invited at its 12 July 2017 meeting representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs) and from the Ministry of Interior (Passport and Immigration Office) to make a presentation on the new security features in Pakistani passports as new formats will be circulated while a stock of old passports will still be used. Brochures with details on the security features were handed over to the participants. The interaction was well received.

The LSC Islamabad remained in close contact with the first Delhi-based officer and his successor, deployed in the framework of the "Regional Schengen Cooperation Officers (RSCO) Project" funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Union. The RSCO project fact sheet has been circulated to the LSC members. Further to the 2017 review of the project, it was stated that the focus of the RSCOs will be on exchanging information on visa trends and patterns and compiling a regional overview, assessing local Schengen cooperation and making recommendations for sustainable cooperation as well as sharing best practices in a regional guide. The successive RSCOs have visited Islamabad, attending the LSC on a few occasions (with the aim to attend on a quarterly basis) and also interacted bilaterally with the EU Delegation and a series of diplomatic missions in Islamabad. In May 2017, the RSCO participated in the LSC via videoconference, an experience that could not be repeated due to technical challenges. The LSC participants receive the reports made by the RSCOs, including one sharing best practices. The minutes of the LSC meetings are shared with the RSCOs.

On 13 February 2018, an ad hoc LSC Afghanistan was organized for the Islamabad-based missions issuing Schengen visas for Afghan applicants living in Afghanistan. The Delegation also hosted a dedicated "Afghanistan ad hoc Anti-Fraud Group" at the suggestion of a Member State on 15 February 2018.

On 19 March 2018, the LSC Chair visited the German and Italian Career Consuls based in Karachi and appraised them of the work of the LSC in Islamabad, including in terms of the preparation of the list of documents. Statistics and trends in visa emissions were also discussed on the occasion.

4. Challenges

Year on year, the issue of addressing fraud and fraudulent practices or schemes remain the main challenge for Schengen missions in Pakistan. The LSC therefore continues to focus on these issues through regular exchanges information.

In the next reporting period, the implementation of the harmonised list of document once the implementing decision is taken will be key. The LSC missions will furthermore have to update the information to the public.

Regarding the misuse of Directive 2004/38/EC that was earmarked in the previous report, the LSC missions followed the work of the expert meeting in Brussels and have been encouraged to share evidence with their headquarters for further relay to the Commission and the expert meeting.

As all missions are confronted with fraudulent documentation (including however for long term national visa applications in particular), the LSC would welcome initiatives or support to set up a task force to pool resources and conduct field visits.

5. Other issues

The "European Migration Liaison Officer" who took his duties at the EU Delegation on 1 March 2017, attended the LSC meetings in Islamabad on a regular basis. The EMLO's main focus regards the implementation of the EU-Pakistan 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, which meets twice a year. Separate EU coordination meetings are chaired by the EU Delegation in relation to the Readmission Agreement. The EMLO also closely monitors the situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and other migration related activities and projects.

Report adopted by the LSC at its 10 April 2018 meeting.



24/5/2018

**PERU: LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC)
2017-2018 REPORT⁵⁶**

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 and when necessary, Schengen-related issues will be dealt with in the EU Consular Group meetings as a separate item on the agenda.

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, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

No ad hoc LSC meetings were held in this period. However, Schengen issues were discussed in some of the meetings between the Heads of EU Missions, Consuls and Political Advisors.

The agendas for the consular meetings include several subjects of common interest: the situation of prisoners from EU and Schengen countries in Peruvian prisons; the new legislative framework on migration (Law on Migration, Implementing Regulation and Single Text of Administrative Procedures [TUPA]); issues relating to the removal of EU tourists who enter the country without having their passport stamped, usually by land from Bolivia or Ecuador; security risks; assisting EU / Schengen citizens with the effects of natural disasters; Joint EU Consular Crisis Preparedness Framework; etc.

⁵⁶ April 2017-March 2018

Consuls from Schengen countries invite officials from national authorities to their meetings, in particular from the Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Migration Office, to discuss these subjects.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, there were four consular meetings. Spain's General Consulate chaired and organised these meetings during the first half of 2017; the EU Delegation took over this task during the second half of 2017 and the first half of 2018. Most Consuls took part in these meetings.

No Consular / LSC meetings are held outside Lima.

3. Current situation

3.1. Application of the Visa Code

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

The list of documents used to prove the purpose and conditions of a planned stay has not been harmonised, but the differences are minor.

There is no common information sheet, but the information provided by Schengen Consulates is similar.

3.3. Harmonising practices

Harmonising practices 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.

3.4. 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 specific instances of failure to activate the insurance and forged TMI documents.

Peru issues three types of passport:

1. Peruvian passport (ordinary);
2. Diplomatic passport;
3. Special passport.

On 25 February 2016, Peru began issuing biometric passports and ceased production of conventional / non-biometric passports on 31 July 2016. The older passports will remain valid until their expiry, allowing entry into the Schengen area.

3.5. Other LSC initiatives

Information was exchanged through LSC on issues covered by 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, which is accessible on consular and embassy websites, and shared this information with the Peruvian authorities (Peruvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Migration Office).

4. Challenges

During the first two years 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 2018-2019 are:

- Continued monitoring of the impact of the Agreement on Peruvian passenger traffic into the Schengen area, possible entry problems and illegal stays beyond the 90 days allowed for every 180 days.
- Continued direct contact between Schengen 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.
- Decision on the use and format of emergency travel documents to replace lost passports.

5. Miscellaneous

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



May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MANILA, the Philippines 2017-2018 REPORT⁵⁷

1. Introduction

A total of 14 Schengen members (BE, CH, CZ, DE, DK, HU, ES, FR, EL, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE, and AT) are represented in the Philippines. The current representation arrangements on visa matters are as follows:

AT represents Lithuania, BE represents Luxembourg and Slovenia, CZ represents Slovakia, EL represents Portugal, NL represents Poland and Latvia, NO represents Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Estonia

Use of external service providers for the collection of applications: Yes, in some cases.

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. 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. A discussion has been initiated and is continuing on the possible need of updating the list.

3.3 Exchange of information

3.3.1 Statistics

Most Schengen MS Embassies submit statistics on a regular basis. A discussion on the latest available statistics takes place at each LSC meeting. It was decided that consolidated data would be produced by the EU delegation twice a year for a discussion of the LSC group.

⁵⁷ May 2016 – April 2017

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.

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:

- Harmonization of procedures on visa issuance for seafarers in the Philippines:

The LSC group has started a reflexion on a possible harmonization of procedures on visa issuance for seafarers in the Philippines in order to avoid visa shopping and contribute to the decrease of Schengen visa-on-arrival applications from Filipino seamen.

- Schengen visa facilities for business people.
- Chavez-Vilches & Others ruling.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

In 2017, the Consulate of HU to the PH was inaugurated. An exchange of views with the DFA Office of Consular Affairs was organized by the HU Embassy.

4. Challenges

The LSC group has identified the following challenges:

- Visa applications of Filipino family members joining EU citizens entering with other Member States Schengen visas.
- Visa implications of the Chavez-Vilchez & Others ruling (2017) for the PH.
- Exchange of information regarding the handling of Filipinos who have illegally stayed in the Schengen area.



18/04/2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in MOSCOW, ST-PETERSBURG and
EKATERINBURG
2017-2018 REPORT⁵⁸**

1. Introduction

All Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in Moscow with the exception of Liechtenstein which is represented by Switzerland.

15 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in St. Petersburg⁵⁹. 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.

3 Schengen Member States/associated Member States remain present in Ekaterinburg⁶⁰.

At the end of March 2018, 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 Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, Pskov, Rostov on Don and Sovetsk.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During the reporting period, 10 regular LSC meetings were organised in Moscow. All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUD) and well attended by the majority of Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania). Some Member States did not regularly attend the meetings.

During the reporting period, 6 regular LSC meetings were organised in St-Petersburg. All meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation (EUD) and well attended by most, but not by all Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania). Some Member States rarely attended the meetings.

During the reporting period, 1 regular LSC meeting was organised in Ekaterinburg. The meeting was chaired by the EU Delegation (EUD) and well attended by the Schengen Member States (as well as by Bulgaria and Cyprus).

⁵⁸ April 2017 – March 2018

⁵⁹ The Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland. Norway is since the beginning of 2018 represented through its Moscow consulate.

⁶⁰ The Czech Republic, Germany and Hungary. Hungary also issues Schengen visas on behalf of 5 other Member States – Austria, Denmark, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

EUD continued to draw up detailed 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.

Alongside EUD's chairmanship of the three groups, consulates of the Member States in the three LSC locations coordinate their practices with their colleagues in other locations across Russia. The EUD shares by email all relevant documents, letters, statistics, policy updates from the European Commission, LSC agendas and LSC 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 sufficiently 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.). For some Member States, consular staff numbers remain insufficient, and as a result in-depth and background verification of applications can sometimes prove challenging due to the overall very high volume of applications.

Another issue is Russian applicants attempting to circumvent rules on opening Schengen visas or 90/180 stay by undertaking trips through trips and obtaining visas from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania or Croatia.

Member States have faced situations when holders of service passports refused to present their internal passport, which goes against the legally binding Commission implementing decision on supporting documents that requires the systematic presentation of the internal passport.

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 once again. The majority of the Member States would like to keep the proof of a hotel reservation on the list, while the rest considers 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, visa processing times, 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.
- As every year the share of MEVs issued increases, and in some locations it is more than 90%, the LSC groups attempted to find a common approach on the issuing of MEVs to first time applicants. This was not possible due to different instructions from capitals and due to the fact that in some locations Member States' consulates face strong pressure from the applicants such as wealthy businessmen and relatives of EU citizens for issuing MEVs to first time applicants. For these reasons, several Member States made calls for the establishment in Brussels of common guidelines for the issuance of MEVs.
- *Visa processing times* – The average number of days needed for the processing of visa applications can vary widely between Member States, with some consulates issuing visas under the normal procedure as quickly as under the urgent procedure or even issuing the visa during the same day, while still charging the normal visa fee. These differences create in some locations incentives for 'visa shopping'. Some of the Member States called for a harmonisation as much as possible of these processing times, while taking into account seasonal peaks and differences in staff numbers.
- *Crimea non-recognition policy* – The groups continued exploring how to better implement the June 2016 guidelines on the non-recognition of certain Russian passports. Regarding the territorial competence, all Member States continue referring Crimean residents who attempt to apply in Russia to the EU consulates in Ukraine. Despite all efforts, applicants from Crimea with Russian passports issued after the annexation become increasingly difficult to detect due to new strategies employed to conceal their residence. It is impossible in practice to check every single application due to the high volumes of applicants, and a check is initiated only when a serious doubt about a possible Crimean residency emerges. The main question discussed was how to deal with Crimean applicants that have quit Crimea and are legally-residing in Russia. The groups concluded that the current EU non-recognition guidelines have been made obsolete by the developments on the ground, the ingenuity of the applicants and the counter-measures put in place by the Russian authorities in Russia and in Crimea.
- The groups asked the EU and the Member States in Brussels to harmonise the internal instructions regarding the issuance of visas for former Crimean residents who legally reside in Russia.

- *Schengen visas issued to human rights' defenders* – A joint meeting between the Moscow LSC group and the EU human rights Counsellors took place to discuss common practices when processing visa applications from HRDs in accordance with the EU Visa Code and the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement (VFA). Best practices were exchanged and emphasis was put on the importance of increasing the awareness of the HRDs on the visa application process, while at the same time improving exchange of information between Member States' embassies' visa and political sections. The EEAS/European Commission guidelines on Visa Facilitations to representatives of NGOs, civil society and human rights defenders in RF were distributed and discussed by the groups.

3.4 Exchange of information

Statistics

The LSC groups have been 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. Most Member States faced in the beginning of 2017 a sharp increase in visa applications, especially in Saint-Petersburg and Moscow, which might lead to increase of overall volumes of visas issues in 2017 compared to 2016, as well as a further increase of the share of MEVs issued. Furthermore, it was established that the share of MEVs issued and the visa refusal rate between the different LSC locations and consulates can greatly differ.

Cases of fraud

Information on cases of fraud and refusals was regularly exchanged within the LSC groups. Falsified proof of economic activity, fake hotel bookings, fake travel medical insurances and financial documents are still wide-spread among applicants and an increase in their use was observed in the fall of 2017. Some travel agencies are providing applicants with fraudulent supporting documents, often without their knowledge. Cases of medical insurances used for expensive treatment in the EU are still occurring.

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.

Implementation of the Visa Information System

On the topic of VIS implementation the question of how to enter biometric and non-biometric Russian passports' numbers into VIS was discussed in detail. Many of the consulates enter the Russian travel document number (TDN) without "N" or "space" into the system. The manner of entering the TDN might impact searches in VIS and potentially also in SIS. While expecting the new VIS regulation and new data quality requirements, the LSC groups agreed for the time being to exclude the N letter from the TDN entered into VIS.

Also, some MS continued experiencing issues with fingerprints validation in VIS. Bad quality fingerprints are accepted by the system when an applicant is granted with a Schengen visa but the quality issues appears only later during subsequent applications. This situation entails that applicants going to a VAC to renovate or apply for a new visa although having had already their biometric data captured, have to pass again through the whole process of biometrics, which is both time consuming for the applicant and has a cost for the country which has to capture again the data. This issue is particularly serious in Russia, the largest country in the world, where applicants have sometimes to move long distance to find a VAC.

The VIS website in Russia (<http://evrovisa.info/>) is being visited by 20.000 unique visitors each month as it is a reference point for some Russian applicants. It also contains a list with the physical address of all the external service provides and Consulates of the Member States in Russia.

Use of VISMail

The LSC groups discussed the obligation for consulates to have access, consult and use regularly VISMail. Several Member States' complained that they receive no replies from other consulates, or that errors appear when using it as if their accounts are not activated. It was established that few consulates use or consult VISMail in reality even for its compulsory uses and even less for its exchange of consular information option. Member States were encouraged rather to use VISMail as a secure channel of communication when exchanging personal data of applicants, rather than regular email or other un-secured forms of communication like phone calls.

A recurring topic was how consulates should use the informal lists of Russian nationals that are issued by the Ministries of Interior of some Member States' and circulated to Schengen consuls in Russia with the aim of preventing them being issued Schengen visas. These so-called "soft alerts" are not inserted in SIS and do not explain the reason why a person should not be issued a Schengen visa. Most consulates cannot take into account such information sent by email channels when making a visa decision both for legal and personal data protection reasons, and they are not allowed to maintain blacklists of potential applicants. Furthermore, from a human resources and IT point of view they cannot use such data. Member States were encouraged to use VISMail for the transmission of such information. Similarly, Member States applied different policies when deciding whether to annul Schengen visas based on lists of Russian hooligans provided by the Russian Ministry of Interior.

The LSC groups asked the EU and the Member States in Brussels to devise a system for the automatic exchange of such data as it concerns Schengen consulates in many other third-countries not just Russia.

Lack of reciprocity

At the same time several MS expressed concern regarding the lack of reciprocity regarding the issuance of MEVs to EU citizens, due to Russia's restrictive consular policies and national legislation. An increasing number of cases were reported of EU citizens stranded at Russian airports when their visa expires while not having yet left Russia. This issue is linked to the fact that Russia rarely issues visa with grace periods and is stricter than Member States' consulates, which concrete consular consequences and is not in line with the Member States' policy towards Russian citizens. A lack of reciprocity was uncovered in one more area - Russia does not allow EU citizens to enter Russia with a valid visa in an invalidated passport, whereas the EU does allow it. Furthermore, Russian consulates have officially acknowledged of implementing a new policy according to which EU/Schengen NGOs and public organisations that apply for Russian short-stay visas do not fall under the scope of the EU-Russia VFA.

Other issues

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 Member States reported that few asylum seekers are applying at the Member States consulates for refugee status or national humanitarian visas. Several cases of Jehovah Witnesses' members were reported as well as some members of the LGBT community in Chechnya.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

As external guest speakers were invited the Russian Tour Operators Union (RATA), the Association of Tour Operators in the field of outbound tourism (TURPOMOSHCH - Tourassist), the Association of Tour Operators of Russia (ATOR) and the Migration Committee of the Association of European Businesses (AEB).

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 LSC groups were associated for the preparation of the April 2018 EU-Russia Joint Visa Facilitation Committee.

4. Challenges

1. Describe the response to challenges, if any, listed in the 2016-2017 report

The implementation of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement based on fully reciprocity will remain for the next reporting period as well.

2. Describe subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2018-2019).

The full and proper implementation of the rules regarding the harmonised issuance of MEVs with long validity and MEVs for first time applicants will remain high on the agenda.

The lack of use of VISMail and the lack of legal basis and systems to automatically exchange 'soft alerts' will remain a substantial obstacle in effectively exchanging visa fraud information.

The legal and practical consequences of the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation have reached a new stage and now require the elaboration by the EU and the Member States' central authorities of a common approach if the non-recognition policy is to be meaningfully sustained.

In terms of staffing of the consulates, the peak months for each consulate vary, but require for some of them the allocation of temporary reinforcements from the Member States' headquarters or consulates in the region.

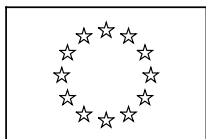
5. Other issues

With around 60 consulates and 350 authorised visa centres across Russia from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok the Schengen Member States aim at making the process simple, fast and safe for citizens applying for visa. The Schengen member states will continue to test some technical mobile alternatives and 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 2017 probably increasing compared to 2016, 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 while respecting the obligations of the Visa Code and the VFA.

The geographical size of the Russian Federation and the very 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' consulates, their back-offices 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.

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This LSC Moscow, St-Petersburg and Ekaterinburg report for 2017-2018 has been approved by all Member States and the EU Delegation in Moscow.



EUROPEAN UNION

DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
TO THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

الاتحاد الأوروبي

مندوبية الاتحاد الأوروبي إلى
المملكة العربية السعودية

Riyadh, 24/4/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Saudi Arabia 2017-2018 REPORT⁶¹

1. Introduction

Since March 2017, following the Delegation's internal reorganization, the political section has taken over LSC/Consular Affairs, and a political officer has been chairing the local MS LSC/Consular affairs coordination group meetings.

There are a total of 18 Schengen Member States⁶² (LSC MS) represented in Riyadh. Four of them⁶³ additionally have general consulates in Jeddah. The majority⁶⁴ of Schengen member states make use of an external service provider (ESP) to collect and process visa applications. This is currently the case for Austria, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All the countries use the services of VFS Global with the exception of ES, which uses BLS International. The majority of these LSC MS use the company's visa application centres in Riyadh, Jeddah and Al-Khobar; a few others use the company's visa application centre only in Riyadh.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The LSC MS regularly met every six weeks at the EUD, chaired by EUD. In the reporting period, a total of five meetings took place. An extraordinary meeting was arranged in order to prepare for the discussion of the visa issues with the Saudi side and the best way forward, and additionally to discuss the Visa Committee's comments on the draft harmonised list approved by the LSC MS in April 2017. The LSC MS meetings are open to all EUMS as observers. However, they were only occasionally attended by CY, EI, RO and UK.

Meetings were always well attended with usually 12-14 participants; none of the LSC MS was regularly absent. During the reporting period the EUD drafted the minutes of the meetings and shared them with the LSC MS in Riyadh. Most of the LSC MS share the minutes with their capitals.

The LSC MS continued to hold its meetings back-to-back with consular cooperation meetings.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

⁶¹ April 2017 – March 2018.

⁶² AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, SE, CH, NO.

⁶³ FR, DE, EL, IT.

⁶⁴ Only PL is not making use of an ESP.

The situation has seen a slight improvement recently due to the fact that the Schengen states have been increasingly cooperating with an external service provider which lead to a better and coordinated informing of the applicants. However, as in previous years, the implementation of the main destination rule (art. 5 VC) remained a challenge: local media and travel agencies often published misleading information about the relevant rules. At the same time, the border control authorities of a certain LSC MS continued to enforce the main destination rule particularly strictly, including refusals of entry at the border. This led to occasional informal complaints from the host country authorities.

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

The LSC MS approved a new draft of harmonised list of supporting documents in April 2017. The draft harmonised list is currently under the Visa Committee's second examination, the outcome of which is expected to lead to the adoption of the new harmonised list for KSA in the first half of 2018. The new harmonised list of supporting documents will replace the current harmonised list, dated back to September 2011.

Once the new harmonised list enters into force, the EUD will remind LSC MS of the need to ensure a harmonised application of the new list and the need to keep its elements publicly available. During the next reporting period the EUD will also follow up on the correct implementation of the new harmonised list, including the consulates in Jeddah.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

In view of the regular challenges met by the LSC MS in their relations with the External Service Providers, the EUD in agreement with the LSC is planning to carry out an inspection visit to the Riyadh visa centres to convey the message of a united, uniform approach of all Schengen countries in KSA.

The length of validity of MEVs issued to Saudi applicants⁶⁵ is on average as follows: up to 1-year >65%, 2-year 23%, 3-year 7%, 4-year 4% and 5-year 1%.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC MS regularly discussed the situation of Yemeni and Syrian visa applicants, in view of the guarantees given by a number of EU governments to refugees arriving on their territories.

The LSC MS regularly discussed their experience with the External Service Providers and exchanged best practice as to the enforcement of legal and contractual obligations.

They also circulated amongst each other cases of suspected fraud bilaterally or by means of the LSC mailing list.

⁶⁵The length of the validity of MEVs issued to non-Saudi applicants follows a different trend to that of Saudi applicants, seeing a non-Saudi applicant obtaining, by and large, only MEVs up-to 1 year (approx. 95%). Rarely does a non-Saudi get a MEV longer than one year.

The list of trusted providers of Travel Medical Insurance was updated during the reporting period and forwarded to the LSC MS.

As for the quarterly visa statistics, starting from March 2017, the EUD has informed the LSC MS about the correct template to be used and invited the LSC MS to comply with the obligation to provide the statistics data (art. 48.3.a VC). The EUD has also shared the global overview statistics for KSA in 2017 to HQ.

The EUD reminded the LSC MS of the need to regularly inform their consulates in Jeddah of the outcomes of the LSC meetings.

As for the use of VISMail, approximately one third of Schengen MS thus far are using the VISmail.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

With regards to the External Service Providers and their optional services or their outsourcing of other services (hotel/flight bookings, travel insurance) in their premises, the LSC MS agreed upon the text of common disclaimer information for applicants. The disclaimer, provided both the English and Arabic is displayed at all VFS Global visa centres in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh, Jeddah and Al-Khobar) as well as on the websites of all represented Schengen countries.

Due to regular serious issues with Saudi visa procedures for Schengen citizens, the EUD followed up on the request, dated 2015, for a joint meeting with the Saudi side to discuss these issues. The MoFA consular department agreed in principle to meet with EU – LSC MS to discuss visa issues. However, despite several attempts to set a meeting, the Saudi side has remained evasive.

In the meantime, the EUD prepared together with the LSC MS a list of potential visa issues that the EU would like to discuss with the Saudi side.

4. Challenges

The EUD should continue to follow up and try to secure the joint meeting with the Saudi side to discuss visa issues for Schengen citizens at the earliest convenience.

During the next reporting period the EUD will also need to follow up on the correct implementation of the new upcoming harmonised list, especially in the first period after its adoption.

Moreover, the ESP centres should be closely monitored with regards to the conveying of the message that all Schengen countries should receive a united, uniform approach from all ESP centres throughout KSA.

5. Other issues

During the reporting period the LSC MS commended Saudi authorities for their efforts to improve the procedures for visa applications from Schengen citizens. However, most of the LSC MS still expressed dissatisfaction in that they were issuing visas rather generously to Saudi applicants but with blatant absence of any reciprocity in visa relations between EU/Schengen and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Most of the LSC MS consider Saudi Arabian procedures for the issuance of visas to business travellers to still be comparatively lengthy, cumbersome and unpredictable.

Saudi Arabia still issues single-entry visas, including for business travellers and continues to put up obstacles to visa applications from young women. Saudi Arabia is about to issue tourist visas, nevertheless not much is known about tourist visa. Saudi Arabian embassies / consulates in MS are now widely using external service providers which, in general, offer a very costly service and in some cases are very inefficient.

This report was discussed and revised at the LSC meeting held on 12 April; and was endorsed by LSC MS through a silence procedure on 18 April 2018.



Dakar, le 30 avril 2018

COOPERATION LOCALE AU TITRE DE SCHENGEN ENTRE LES CONSULATS DES ETATS-MEMBRES (LSC) AU SENEGAL RAPPORT⁶⁶ 2017-2018

1. Introduction

Au Sénégal 13 Etats membres Schengen sont représentés: Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, Roumanie, Royaume-Uni, la République Tchèque et la Suisse. Depuis le dernier rapport, les Ambassades de la République Tchèque, du Luxembourg et de la Pologne sont désormais dirigées par un Ambassadeur.

11 consulats (Allemagne, Autriche, Belgique, Espagne, France, Italie, Pays-Bas, Pologne, Portugal, Roumanie, Suisse) délivrent des visas aux ressortissants du Sénégal et des pays qui se trouvent sous leur juridiction respective (voir l'annexe). Les visas pour le Luxembourg sont délivrés par la Belgique et pour la République Tchèque par l'Autriche. 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, 8 Etats Membres disposent des accords pour la délivrance des visas avec 4 EM représentés (l'Estonie et la Finlande avec la France; la Grèce, la Hongrie, Malte et Slovaquie avec l'Autriche, la Suède avec l'Espagne, la Slovaquie avec les Pays-Bas).

2. Réunions LSC organisées pour la période 2017-2018

Les réunions de coordination, présidées par la Délégation de l'Union européenne, au niveau de Chef de la Section Politique, sont tenues régulièrement. Durant la période couverte par le rapport, trois réunions de coordination Schengen standard se sont tenues: en juin 2017, octobre 2017 et janvier 2018.

Lors des réunions de coordination, les statistiques de visas sont partagées et analysées, des informations sur les cas de fraude documentaire et des filières d'immigration clandestine pour le Sénégal et les pays de la région: Gambie, Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Cap Vert etc. discutés.

La Senior Expert de l'Unité en charge de la politique des visas et sécurité des documents à la DG Migrations et Affaires intérieures de la Commission européenne à Bruxelles a participé à la réunion de coordination en octobre 2017 à l'occasion de sa visite à Dakar dans le cadre d'un séminaire de formation sur la coordination Schengen dispensé aux Délégations de l'Union européenne en Afrique, en charge de cette coordination. Elle a pu partager au sein du groupe LSC Sénégal des informations sur les initiatives européennes en cours, notamment la révision de la base juridique du système d'information sur les visas (VIS) et une consultation publique sur l'abaissement de l'âge pour le relevé des empreintes digitales dans le cadre de la procédure de visa.

⁶⁶ Avril 2017 – Mars 2018

Des réunions thématiques avec la participation d'invités externes se sont également tenues dans la période couverte par le rapport. Un séminaire avec des représentants de 8 établissements bancaires basés à Dakar a été organisé en mai 2017. Les représentants des banques ont exposé les caractéristiques des relevés bancaires émis par chacune d'entre elles afin de faciliter le travail de vérification de l'authenticité des relevés bancaires soumis aux Consulats par les demandeurs de visas. Etant donné une importante fraude documentaire pratiquée au Sénégal, notamment en ce qui concerne les relevés bancaires, ces présentations se sont avérées très utiles pour les agents de visas.

Un grand pourcentage de demandes de visa Schengen au Sénégal provenant des opérateurs économiques, une réunion a été organisée en octobre 2017 avec l'Agence sénégalaise de promotion des investissements (APIX), chargée d'enregistrer et délivrer des documents d'identification aux entreprises au Sénégal. Un grand nombre de documents justificatifs présentés par les prétendus opérateurs techniques étant faux, APIX a présenté les différents types d'entreprises existantes dans la législation du Sénégal, des caractéristiques standard des documents d'identification d'entreprises afin de faciliter aux Consulats le travail de vérification de l'authenticité des extraits du registre de commerce et des documents d'immatriculation d'entreprises etc.

Sur l'initiative du Consulat d'Espagne une réunion sur la fraude a été organisée en décembre 2017.

Une très bonne participation des Etats membres Schengen a été notée lors de toutes les réunions mentionnées. 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, est invité à participer à toutes les réunions de coordination Schengen au Sénégal. Il y participe activement et a proposé un plan pour son assistance à la Coordination Locale Schengen au Sénégal, approuvé par le groupe.

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 et du RSCO. Entre les réunions, la circulation de l'information est régulière grâce à une liste de diffusion constituée à cet effet. Plusieurs Etats membres prennent l'initiative de soumettre une question ou partager une information avec les autres EM. La Délégation de l'UE partage régulièrement les informations sur les initiatives prises à Bruxelles dans le domaine de la politique européenne des visas.

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 (société VfS Global pour la France, l'Italie, les Pays-Bas et le Portugal, et la société BLS pour l'Espagne).

Le nombre total des demandes de visa a connu une augmentation de 15% avec 69.250 pour 2017 par rapport à 59.920 de demandes en 2016. Les pays qui en 2017 ont reçu le plus de demandes sont la France (40.333), l'Espagne (7.170) et l'Italie (6.627). Le taux de refus de visas reste élevé (autour de 40% en général). Les taux les plus faibles de refus en 2017 étaient ceux de la Suisse (23%, en raison d'un grand nombre des visas officiels délivrés pour des réunions internationales à Genève), de la France (33%) et de l'Autriche (33%). Les taux les plus importants de refus étaient ceux des Pays-Bas (57%), du Portugal (52%) et de l'Espagne (45%).

La Suisse (+46%), la Belgique (+39%) et la France (+30%) ont connu la plus importante augmentation de demandes de visas en 2017. Une réduction la plus significative du nombre de demandes de visas est à noter en 2017 pour les Pays-Bas (-30%), l'Autriche (-19%) et l'Espagne (-14%).

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

Les pratiques concernant les documents justificatifs devant être fournis par les demandeurs de visas sont discutées et échangées régulièrement lors des réunions de coordination.

En octobre 2017, il a été convenu qu'il serait opportun de procéder au sein de la Coordination Locale Schengen au Sénégal à l'établissement d'une liste harmonisée des documents justificatifs afin d'harmoniser les pratiques, d'éviter les écarts entre les consulats et éviter le "visa shopping". Un groupe de travail restreint ("Task force") a été constitué (avec des Etats membres volontaires: Allemagne, Espagne, France, Belgique, ainsi que la Délégation de l'UE et le RSCO), pour effectuer le travail préparatoire (identifier les différences existantes et identifier les documents potentiels pour l'harmonisation). Un projet de liste a été établi au sein de cette Task force et partagé au sein de la Coordination plus large. A la suite de son approbation au niveau local et des commentaires initiaux de la DG HOME, la liste a été soumise officiellement à la Commission européenne le 30 mars en vue de sa prochaine présentation au Comité Visa, qui pourrait avoir lieu en 2018.

3.3 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 les taux de refus et les principales raisons de ces refus.
- Les cas de fraude documentaire (falsification des documents de voyage, manque de fiabilité d'actes d'état civil, utilisation de plusieurs identités et des passeports par la même personne, abus d'utilisation des passeports diplomatiques etc.)
- Les filières d'immigration clandestine (demandes de groupes avec faux buts de voyage: religieux, sportif, culturel, etc).
- Le partage d'expériences sur la vérification d'authenticité des documents délivrés par les autorités du Sénégal et les pays sous la juridiction des Consulats basés au Sénégal.
- La viabilité des sociétés d'assurance de voyage.

3.4 D'autres initiatives prises en LSC

Un séminaire de formation pour les Délégations de l'UE en Afrique assurant la présidence des LSC

Un défi relatif à la formation des Délégations sur le rôle de la présidence de la Coordination Locale Schengen avait été signalé auprès des services compétents de la DG HOME. Sur l'initiative de la Délégation au Sénégal, un séminaire de formation a été dispensé le 9 octobre 2017 à Dakar à la DUE par la Senior Expert de l'Unité en charge de la politique des visas et sécurité des documents à la DG Migrations et Affaires intérieures de la Commission européenne à Bruxelles. Sept Délégations de l'UE en Afrique ont pu prendre part à ce séminaire, lors duquel un rappel du cadre réglementaire et des manuels opérationnels clés relatifs à la politique commune des visas a été effectué et des conseils pratiques sur les réunions, leur animation, les informations à échanger ont été donnés. Un échange de bonnes pratiques entre les délégations de la région s'est également avéré très utile.

Appui 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, continue à participer aux réunions, préparer des rapports sur les tendances régionales en matière des visas et partager des bonnes pratiques utilisées dans d'autres pays sous sa responsabilité. Il a également finalisé la compilation des statistiques de visas pour l'année 2017. Il apporte ainsi une contribution positive à la coordination Schengen au Sénégal.

Extension des contacts aux pays tiers dans lesquels les EM résidant à Dakar sont accrédités

Il a été convenu au sein de la Coordination Locale Schengen au Sénégal qu'il serait utile d'établir une liste des personnes de contact au sein des consulats des Etats membres qui ont une présence permanente dans les pays tiers et que la plupart des autres Etats membres couvrent depuis Dakar (par exemple: Consulat du Portugal en Guinée Bissau, Consulat de France en Guinée etc.) en cas des questions et un éventuel échange d'information lié aux demandes de visa.

4. Défis

La fraude documentaire continue à constituer un défi important au Sénégal et dans d'autres pays de la région dans lesquels les Etats membres basés à Dakar sont accrédités. Ces pays se situent parmi les principaux pays d'origine de migration irrégulière en Europe. De véritables réseaux, de plus en plus professionnels, spécialisés en production ou légalisation de (faux) documents d'état civil se sont développés dans la région. Deux réseaux de ce type ont été récemment démantelés par les autorités sénégalaises.

Les cas d'utilisation de faux tampons et emblèmes du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, des faux passeports, y inclus diplomatiques, des passeports multiples en cours de validité détenus par la même personne, la création des comptes en banque factices, alimentés sur une très courte période; de faux documents justificatifs, y inclus des faux extraits bancaires, des réservations de vols et d'hôtel factices ou annulées ont été notés dans la période couverte par le présent rapport.

Les demandes groupées de visas par des prétendus artistes, sportifs ou leaders religieux requièrent une vigilance particulière, car plusieurs entre elles se sont avérées être des tentatives frauduleuses de migration irrégulière. Concernant les fraudes liées à l'état civil, le manque de formation des autorités locales dans la détection des faux documents est déploré.

Abus des droits découlant de la Directive 2004/38

Plusieurs Etats membres rencontrent des problèmes que pose la mise en œuvre de la Directive européenne 2004/38 relative au droit des citoyens de l'Union et des membres de leurs familles de circuler et de séjourner librement sur le territoire des États membres. En effet, des ressortissants de l'UE, d'origine étrangère, qui ont acquis la nationalité européenne et, avec elle, certains avantages. Certains acquièrent ces nationalités indûment et traversent les frontières Schengen pour obtenir un séjour dans un autre état membre sur cette base. D'autres obtiennent réellement ces nationalités UE et s'inscrivent dans un autre pays Schengen de manière à multiplier les avantages en matière de séjour UE (notamment pour faire venir les multiples épouses (polygamie) et enfants issus de ces unions, détourner les exigences nationales en matière de regroupement familial (exigences linguistiques, moyens financiers à posséder, etc). Des demandes dans ce sens sont de plus en plus fréquemment soumises aux Consuls à Dakar. Les Etats membres signalent l'insuffisance des exigences documentaires découlant de la directive, notamment en matière de moyens de la personne à rejoindre, ce qui accentue selon eux les détournements des règles nationales en vue du regroupement familial dans les Etats membres. Le manque d'une base de données commune UE qui pourrait permettre une vérification des informations, constitue également un défi.

La non-fiabilité des documents d'état civil

Au Sénégal et dans certains autres pays de la région (Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Gambie), on constate un niveau très élevé de non-fiabilité des documents d'état civil. Pour le Sénégal sont en premier lieu concernés la zone frontalière avec la Mauritanie et les communes précaires de Dakar.

5. Divers

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 30 avril 2018.

Annexe 1: Tableau de représentation visa Schengen au Sénégal

Annexe 2: Tableau d'accréditation des Etats membres basés à Dakar

Annexe 1

Tableau de représentation visa Schengen au Sénégal

ETAT MEMBRE	VISA
Allemagne	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Autriche	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Belgique	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Bulgarie	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chypre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Croatie	<input type="checkbox"/>
Danemark	<input type="checkbox"/>
Espagne	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Estonie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> France
Finlande	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> France
France	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Grèce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Autriche
Hongrie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Autriche
Irlande	<input type="checkbox"/>
Italie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lettonie	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lituanie	<input type="checkbox"/>
Luxembourg	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Belgique
Malte	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Autriche
Pays-Bas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Pologne	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Portugal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
République Tchèque	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Autriche
Roumanie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Slovénie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Autriche
Slovaquie	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pays-Bas
Suède	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Espagne
Suisse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Annexe 2

Tableau d'accréditation des Etats membres basés à Dakar

ETAT MEMBRE/ DAKAR	ACCREDITATION
ALLEMAGNE	Sénégal, Gambie, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert
AUTRICHE	Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone
BELGIQUE	Sénégal, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert + Mauritanie pour les visas long séjour uniquement
ESPAGNE	Sénégal, Gambie
FRANCE	Sénégal, Gambie + uniquement pour les aspects consulaires: Guinée-Bissau et Cap Vert
GRANDE-BRETAGNE	Sénégal, Guinée-Bissau, Cap Vert
ITALIE	Sénégal, Cap Vert, Gambie, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau, Mali
LUXEMBOURG	Sénégal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso
PAYS-BAS	Sénégal, Gambie, Mauritanie, Cap Vert, Guinée, Guinée-Bissau
POLOGNE	Accréditation en cours : Sénégal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Gambie, Guinée, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée Bissau, Cap Vert
PORTUGAL	Sénégal, Mauritanie, Gambie, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée, Sierra Leone, Libéria
RÉPUBLIQUE TCHEQUE	Sénégal, Guinée, Gambie
ROUMANIE	Sénégal, Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Burkina Faso, Gambie, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Cap Vert
SUISSE	Sénégal, Mauritanie, Cap Vert, Gambie, Mali, Guinée-Bissau



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN SOUTH AFRICA

Report – 2017 – 2018⁶⁷

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 are 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, 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.

Portugal has an Embassy in Pretoria and two Consulate Generals (one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town). Currently only the Consul Generals deal with visas assisted by outsource corporation. Pretoria no longer deals with visas.

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, Germany represents Slovenia,

⁶⁷April 2017 – March 2018

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 2017 to March 2018

From April 2017 to March 2018 the Local Schengen Coordination (LSC) group met twice⁶⁸. The meetings on 7 June 2107 and 28 February 2018 and combined the Consular- and Schengen Group meetings (back to back but with different participation) in order to accommodate agenda items for both groups during the staff rotation period.

During this report period the LSC meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and Austria. The EU Delegation also prepared, drafted and distributed all relevant documents.

The group invited the following presenters to the LSC group meetings:

- The German Federal Police (Document and Visa Advisor, Airline Liaison Officer) to make a presentation listing specific examples and cases of applicants who try and obtain Schengen visas with fraudulent documents.
- The Senior Regional Thematic Specialist (Immigration and Border Management for Southern African) who gave a presentation on the verification services offered by the International Organisation for Migration.

The LSC Group meetings discussed issues of relevance to their work in South Africa. These included amongst others the outcome of the "List of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants in South Africa for short stay visas in Schengen countries", applicants using fraudulent documents to obtain Schengen visas, asylum seekers and refugee applications, visa statistics for the period 2015-2017 and verification of bank statements for sailors.

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.

⁶⁸ 7 June 2017, 28 February 2018

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

The "List of supporting document to be submitted by applicants in South Africa for short stay visas in Schengen countries" was adopted on 30 August 2017 in EN version.

Language versions were to follow after 30 August 2017. Central authorities would have been notified accordingly.

The group was requested to agree on a date of implementation which should not be longer than 7 to 10 days after notification. Therefore the proposal was made for the 11th of September 2017 as a feasible implementation date by Consulates.

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

Presentation of fraudulent documents remains a problem. Presentations and discussions focused on applicants trying to obtain Schengen Visas with fraudulent documents and amongst other bank statements.

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 the REPUBLIC OF KOREA
2017-2018 REPORT⁶⁹**

1. Introduction

22 EU Member States (EU MS) out of 28 were present in the Republic of Korea (RoK). 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, Slovenia (time of crisis) 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.

European citizens in the RoK are relatively small in volume and counted around 16,000 registered foreigners in 2016⁷⁰. As elsewhere, it was 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 2017 to March 2018, six EU/LSC Consular cooperation group meetings were held on 21 and 26 April, 16 August (ad hoc meeting), 18 October and 14 December 2017 and on 22 January 2018. A special LSC session was organized on 8 June 2017 in order to allow for a Schengen Visa training offered by the German Embassy to increase awareness and prevent visa fraud. All meetings except one were held at the EUDEL; one meeting was held on the invitation of the chair at a hotel.

During the reported period EU MS/Schengen local consular group meetings were chaired by the local chair. Slovakia exercised the local chair until the end of June 2017. In the absence of Estonia in the country, Bulgaria chaired the EU/LSC meetings in the second half of 2017 and continued chairing in the first half of 2018.

In supporting of the local chairs, the EU Delegation regularly issued the invitations and drafted meeting reports. The participation of MS in these meetings was satisfactory. Among the 22 EU MS presented in the RoK, around 20 country's representatives usually participated in the meetings. Switzerland and Norway attended the LSC meetings regularly (Iceland and Liechtenstein do not have diplomatic representations in the RoK).

3. State of play

⁶⁹ April 2017 – March 2018

⁷⁰ Data of the Korea Immigration Service for 2016

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Due to the Visa-free regime up to 90 days with the RoK, the LSC discussions on the application of the Visa Code were fairly limited. The discussions focused on practical issues, such as an issue of applying for Schengen Visa with a soon expiring local Alien Card.

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

The LSC agreed on the usefulness of having a harmonized list of supporting documents. The LSC discussed and agreed with a draft harmonized list of supporting documents as compiled by the EU Delegation and submitted it for the VISA Committee discussion. The Visa Committee discussed the draft on 4 October 2017 and 15 February 2018, respectively. The Committee's recommendations were discussed by the LSC group on 14 December 2017 and on 17 April 2108 and the amended draft was sent to Brussels for further deliberations by the Visa Committee.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No discussion.

3.4 Exchange of information

The LSC meetings are appreciated as a good platform to exchange consular-related information. The discussion particularly included the exchange of experience in dealing with Korean authorities (VIP treatment at the airport, road safety, VAT refund). The exchange of information works well also via e-mail and a mobile application WhatsApp (focused on security and safety issues).

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

During the reported period, the LSC also:

- Discussed and endorsed the joint EU Consular Preparedness Framework in Seoul;
- Shared practical experience of crisis emergency procedures of local Embassies and discussed the host government' approach to this issue;
- A WhatsApp Consular group was set up by the EUDEL in order to facilitate rapid information exchange among the LSC members;
- Updated the local Consular Handbook;
- Discussed preparations for the Winter Olympic/Paralympic Games;
- Assessed security and safety situation in the RoK in view of adapting the travel advice and messaging alignment according to the actual situation.

4. Challenges

In the upcoming period, the LSC would need to focus on enhancing of sharing of visa statistics (refusal rate, visa issued) and testing consular crisis management procedures (communications lines).

This report has been cleared with the local EU/Schengen Consular group.



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and for the Republic of Maldives

Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC)

22/05/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) COLOMBO (SRI LANKA) 2017-2018 REPORT⁷¹

1. Introduction

There are 5 Schengen diplomatic missions in Colombo (FR,DE,IT,NO,CH) which process their own visa applications and on behalf of other Schengen Member States as well as provide representation for both Sri Lanka and the Maldives. All five missions make use of the services of an external service provider VFS Global Lanka Pvt Ltd for the collection of applications. NL only issues long term visas while it has delegated the processing and issuance of short stay visas to CH. 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>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>	<i>VFS Global Lanka Pvt LTD</i>

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During this reporting period 1 LSC meeting was held (31 January 2018 in the EU Delegation premises in Colombo. UK and RO were invited to attend as observers like in the previous years. The main reason for the reduction in LSC meetings during this calendar year was due to staff movements and thanks to the smooth functioning of the Visa Code. 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.

⁷¹ April 2017 – March 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Schengen Missions in Colombo confirmed that the implementation of the visa code was proceeding smoothly. According to them the support documents they were requesting from the visa applicants corresponded to the harmonized list shown as annex II of the Commission Implementing Decision dated 13 October 2011.

According to **CH** the only problem they encountered in 2017 with the Visa Information System was when 3 visa applications for persons wishing to travel to Luxembourg took more than 15 days to process possibly because colleagues in the capitol did not know the procedure to handle the consultation system. **FR** mentioned that it had some issues with finger prints especially at the harbours.

The missions confirmed that they have recently started using VISMail and so far they have not had any problems with it.

With regard to the granting of long duration visas the missions confirmed that the criteria they used to issue such visas included the number of one year visas issued in the past to an applicant and the frequency of their visits, valid visas they had to other countries like USA, Canada etc, and the validity period of their passports. The issuance of long term visa periods therefore varied on a case by case basis.

According to the Missions, as in the previous years, **visa shopping** is happening but thanks to the Visa Information System which is fully operational, they are able to detect these attempts and take the necessary action.

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. However most of the missions confirmed that the criteria they used to issue such visas partially coincided which included them taking into consideration the number of annual visas issued in the past to an applicant and the frequency of their visits, valid visas they had to other countries like USA, Canada etc, and the validity period of their passports. The missions however maintained different policies with regard to the length of the Multiple Entry Visas which they said varied on a case by case basis.

3.4 Exchange of information

Schengen missions continue to exchange information on the following:

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". Recently the common service provider moved to a new premises and the Schengen Missions who visited this location were of the view that the new location and the facilities could help improve the services to the visa applicants.

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.

Statistics

Schengen missions continued to compile and share visa statistics at the LSC meeting.

IT mentioned that it received 7873 visa applications in 2017 of which it refused 1205 applications thus making the refusal rate approximately 15%. According to **IT** in 2017 there was a 26 % increase in visa applications received compared to the previous year. **CH** mentioned that it received 8142 visa applications in 2017 of which it refused 1465 applications thus making the refusal rate 18%. According to **CH** in 2017 there was a 23% increase in visa applications received compared to the previous year. **FR** mentioned that it received 13,232 visa applications in 2017 of which it refused 2452 applications thus making the refusal rate approximately 18 %. According to **FR** in 2017 there was a 8% increase in visa applications received compared to the previous year.

NO mentioned that it received approximately 3000 visa applications in 2017 of which it refused 400 applications thus making the refusal rate approximately 14 %. According to **NO** in 2017 there was a 20% increase in visa applications received compared to the previous year.

NL said that it issued 107 long stay visas in 2017 compared to 122 long stay visas issued in 2016 and said that since the applications were approved by the Immigration and Naturalisation Department in the Netherlands the mission did not have more statistics on the number of visa applications made and those refused.

Based on the above data it was evident that during the year 2017 the increase in visa applications varies among the missions from 8 to 26 % compared to the same period last year.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Following complaints received that the Visa Facilitation Service (VFS) was charging additional fees to transport the applications from Jaffna to Colombo, the missions instructed VFS that this was against the Visa Code and to stop this practice immediately to which the VFS had responded positively saying that it will change this practice.

4. Challenges

According to the missions, Identifying the genuineness of some of the visa requests and the fake documentation being submitted continued to be the challenge during this reporting period as well, 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.

A new phenomenon was also noticed in 2017 where people who have been regularly travelling to the Schengen area for business over the years, have suddenly travelled with their entire family to the Schengen area and have claimed asylum. **NO** mentioned that of those who went to **NO** in 2017 with visas, nine people had applied for asylum. **IT** mentioned that in their case when someone does not return to their country of origin they inform the police who in turn contact those who have given invitations letters for such visits.

5. Other issues

FR mentioned that they were working on a new system which once completed will allow the visa applicants to submit their application and all the support documents on-line. At present only visa application forms and the appointment requests could be obtained on-line.

The missions confirmed that Schengen visa's for Maldivians were all issued in Colombo and that UK was the only mission which had a mobile centre in the Maldives but during the summer months.



LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in THAILAND
2017-2018 REPORT⁷²

1. Introduction

In 2017-2018, the number of EU Member States and Schengen Associated States remained unchanged in Thailand. In total, there are nineteen EU Member States and Schengen Associated States 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.

Most EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have outsourced their visa application processing services to private companies primarily as a result of an increased number of visa applications. Currently VFS Global processes visa applications for AT, BE, DK, FI, IT, NL, NO, ES and SE, while TLS Contact manages for FR and CH.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

LSC meetings have been held at regular intervals at the premises of the EU Delegation. During the 2017-2018 reporting period, a total of five LSC meetings were held, on 25 May 2017, 10 August 2017, 7 November 2017, 31 January 2018 and 22 March 2018. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and were well attended by EU Member States and Schengen Associated States. Reports of the meetings are drawn up by the EU Delegation and shared with EU Member States and Associated Schengen States and with DG HOME in Brussels.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code was applied and no major deficiencies or problems were noted.

⁷² April 2017 – March 2018

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

WITH THE COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION C (2017) 5853 of 30.08.2017 establishing the list of supporting documents to be submitted by applicants for short stay visas in Thailand EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have applied the list since 15 September 2017. EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have exchanged views on the practical application of the common list in subsequent LSC meetings.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Minor differences in practices have been discussed at LSC meetings, but no attempts to harmonise these have been undertaken.

3.4 Exchange of information

Information regarding fraud and statistics was exchanged between the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States via email and discussed during LSC meetings. The EU Delegation compiles the data and circulates yearly statistics among the EU Member States and Schengen Associated States.

EU Member States and Schengen Associated States in Thailand have a common list of travel and health insurance companies and new applications are accepted in the LSC meetings. There are currently around 40 companies on the list. There have been no reports from insurance takers of misconduct among travel insurance companies in the period 2017-2018 to the EU Member States, Schengen Associated States or the EU Delegation.

4. Challenges

Most EU Member States and Schengen Associated States have experienced a significant increase in visa applications in 2017. In response to this challenge, some EU Member States and Schengen Associated States had outsourced tasks, some would receive special personnel assistance in periods with an increased workload and others would work overtime.

5. Other issues

No other issues to report.

This report has been approved by all EU Member States and Schengen Associated States represented in Thailand.



11/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO 2017-2018 REPORT⁷³

1. Introduction

The MS present in Trinidad & Tobago are: DE, ES, FR, NL, and UK.

Citizens of Trinidad & Tobago benefit from a visa waiver agreement with the EU since 28 May 2015 and no longer need a Schengen visa for short stays (90 days) within a six-month period. With regards to issuing Schengen visas for citizens of other countries residing in T&T and who do not benefit from the Visa Waiver Scheme, the MS have the following agreements if the main destination is a non-represented EU Schengen MS:

- If the main destination is Estonia, Germany, Italy, Malta or Portugal: please apply at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- If the main destination is Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Norway, Poland or Sweden: please apply at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands;
- If the main destination is France or Spain: please apply at the Embassy of the Kingdom of Spain;
- Travellers to Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland need to consult with the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs of these countries in order to obtain further information.⁷⁴

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Between April 2017 and March 2018, two LSC meetings took place: on 5th October 2017 and on 23rd March 2018. The meetings were attended by all represented MS and were chaired by the EU. The reports on the meetings are drawn up by the EUD and shared with MS subsequently. MS have not informed the EUD if they use these reports for own consumption.

The LSC meetings in T&T follow a bi-annual rhythm. The next meeting is foreseen in October 2018. *Ad hoc* meetings did not occur and were not deemed necessary.

There is no coordination with the LSC in locations outside the capital as T&T is a fairly small country (5131 km²).

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

All EU actors in Trinidad and Tobago are usually prepared to carry out their LSC tasks as described in the Visa Code. As Trinidad & Tobago is benefiting from a visa waiver agreement and as only DE and ES are taking decisions on visas (the NL system being centralised in The Hague), these tasks are limited.

⁷³ April 2017 – March 2018

⁷⁴ This information is also available at https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/trinidad-and-tobago/762/travel-and-study-involving-trinidad-and-tobago-and-eu_en

There are no reported issues with regards to the implementation of the Visa Code. MS report that in rare individual cases, additional time is required to determine the appropriate legal basis, but this is usually related to the individual circumstances of the applicant.

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

MS consider that harmonisation of practices and of the lists of supporting documents are already acquired on a practical level. There are some minor differences in the details of certain questions, such as the cover total for instance. Represented MS do not believe in the utility of establishing a common list, as the individual lists already published by MS do contain the same content.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

If an applicant has previously received a Schengen visa, and depending on the circumstances of the applicant (financial means, relevance to the public interest or to the EU economies, etc.), MS usually issue a long-term visa, even if the first Schengen visa was issued by another MS. This long-term visa is usually first a 1-year MEV, and if the applicant subsequently repeats his demand, MS tend to issue 2-3 year MEVs. MS did not provide numbers or statistics.

3.4 Exchange of information

Within the LSC, MS report individual cases that proved to be more difficult and generally exchange information about their visa practices. As only few missions are issuing visas and as Trinidad and Tobago benefits from a visa waiver agreement, these exchanges are limited.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A.

4. Challenges

N/A

5. Other issues

It was difficult to receive input for the report from the represented MS, therefore information might not be as complete as desired.



18 May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in TUNISIA
2017-2018 REPORT⁷⁵

1. Introduction

Eighteen Member States are present in Tunisia (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden and United Kingdom). 15 of those deliver Schengen visas, the other three, being Bulgaria, Romania and United Kingdom, do not. One non-EU Member State also delivers Schengen visas (Switzerland).

Five 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 Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and Norway. During the reporting period, the majority of Member States had approximately the same number of Schengen visa requests compared to the previous year, while few others had increases ranging from 8 to 15%, mainly for reasons of family reunification and tourism. The trend is expected to remain steady in the coming future.

As of the number of visas issued by each Member States during the reporting period, it varies from few hundreds to over 160,000 requests processed. The average refusal rate ranged between 7% and 18% and was generally motivated by lack of justifications and supporting documents. MS are fully engaged in reducing as much as possible the processing period which goes from 2 days to 15 days for non-complicated cases. The processing period can go beyond the 15 days deadline only in limited and complex cases requiring special investigation and research.

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 2017-2018

Five LSC meetings took place in the reporting period. All the meetings were well attended by Member States. They were chaired by the Political Section of the EUDEL. EUDEL drafted reports after each meeting and circulated them to the Member States for comments and to be transmitted to their capitals. There is no coordination with the LSC in other locations besides Tunis as the general consulates are only located at the capital. The LSC meetings served as a good opportunity for the consuls to have brainstorming on the topical issues related to their daily activities. For practical reasons, EUDEL organizes the LSC meetings back to back with the Local Consular Group meetings.

⁷⁵ The reporting period is April 2017 – March 2018

On March 1 2018, an ad hoc LSC/LCG meeting was held in the occasion of the visit from EEAS Consular crisis Management Division. This was an occasion to exchange on a large variety of Schengen/Consular matters including the joint EU Consular Preparedness framework. During the LSC meeting of February 15th the Bulgarian consul made an extensive presentation on the Bulgarian presidency agenda.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

In general, Member States did not encounter major problems in the implementation of the Visa Code and have been implementing it appropriately. Few problems have been detected in relation to the requirement of issuing visas within the 15 day period as some consulates have limited resources. The high seasons being the most challenging one. One MS complained about the recurrent malfunction of the Vision service which in few occasions had caused delays in issuing the visas and therefore non respecting the 15 days deadline. To be noted that some MS, also referring to the Visa facilitation negotiations, affirmed that the 15 days timespan should not be reduced.

14 Member States are using the services of an external service provider to handle visa applications and are generally satisfied about their performance and efficiency. All Member States are now collecting biometric data, either directly in their consulates or via the contracted external service provider.

The number of frauds and forgeries aiming at illegally obtaining a Schengen visa remains relatively constant at a high level. This trend continues in spite of the fact that MS have been improving their knowledge and capacities on these matters and despite the extra efforts put in place to prevent and detect the phenomenon. Most frequent frauds relate to: fake bank statements, fake hotel reservations, forged insurance certificates, and invitation letters from unreliable institutes, and false declarations on the social security coverage (CNSS).

MS 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 LSC meetings are the best opportunity for all consulates to exchange openly on those matters and address the problems jointly.

As of the adoption of a common list of agreed insurance companies to cover the traveller during his/her journey in the Schengen territory, the LSC decided not to issue it, since the number of such companies is extremely limited and hardly any problem has been noted on this matter.

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

This question was discussed extensively during the reporting period, revealing different views and positions amongst MS, particularly as regard the need to be more or less demanding and to preserve the option for Consuls to demand additional documents beside those included in the list. EUDEL clarified the contentious points and reminded about the common visa code requirements, leading to a convergence of views ending up on a common list agreed by the whole LSC. The agreed list was subsequently transmitted and reviewed by the Visa Committee on 15 February. The latter formulated a number of comments to be considered by the LSC in Tunis. EUDEL shared with the LSC the comments and proposed a number of replies and amendments to the list. The LSC agreed on an amended version of the list which actually took on board the vast majority of the comments made by the Visa committee. The Visa Committee has yet to give its final agreement to the list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

No other initiatives on harmonisation of practices have been elaborated; however the Member States are open for new harmonisation 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 validity for a maximum 5 years.

3.4 Exchange of information

Information exchange is done through email, telephone, bilateral meetings or through LSC meetings. Statistics are also circulated by email or shared during tours de table in LSC meetings. This information exchange touches upon a large variety of subjects relating to the different challenges that the MS are confronted with in their daily work. Information exchange focuses in particular on specific fraud cases, visa statistics, interview procedures, visa shopping, and travel medical insurances.

All Schengen consulates have access and are using the Visa Information System (VIS) as it is an integral and essential part of the vetting process.

As of the VisMail, the LSC unanimously reported that it does not work. This being an old, unresolved problem, no Consulate tries to use it anymore.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

EUDEL continues the visa facilitation negotiations (in parallel with the readmission agreement negotiations) with the Tunisian authorities. These visa facilitation negotiations are advancing in a constructive manner, although EUDEL is still waiting for the MFA to supply the list containing the categories of workers that should benefit from the agreement. The LSC Group discussed this issue since the result will have an impact on the activities carried out by the MS consulates. 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. As previously underlined, the LSC Group has already expressed its scepticism to the idea of reducing the number of calendar days to process a visa request. As of the visa exemption for diplomatic and Service passports holders, all MS, excluding Latvia, are already applying it. Very few MS do not provide the visa exemption for special or service passports.

The LSC Group has tried to invite the MFA Director General for consular affairs to one of its regular meetings in order to discuss about common challenges and to build confidence; however this invitation was declined. The DG proposed instead to set up this meeting within the MFA premises in the near future. Something that unfortunately hasn't happened yet despite a NV from the EUDEL to the MAE and following reminders.

4. Challenges

Besides the usual challenges (frauds, visa shopping, proof of financial means, issuing Schengen visas to Libyan leaving in Tunisia), the LSC discussed in different occasions about the unabated problem of white/fake marriages. Several MS reported that in many cases the marriages between an EU citizen and a non EU citizen (often an EU woman) are clearly not motivated by the perspective of a common life but by the perspective to obtain a Schengen visa followed by a long term visa and ultimately the EU nationality. MS are often asked to certify marriages between two persons who do not know each other or do not speak the same language. The vast majority of MS explained that despite indisputable evidences, national laws do not allow the consulate to refuse the requests since this could lead to discriminations. Only two MS declared that when they are confronted with a clear case of white marriage, they reject the marriage endorsement and consequently the linked Schengen visa request.

5. Other issues

none

This report has been prepared by the EU Delegation in Tunisia and approved by the Schengen Member States represented in Tunisia.



EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO TURKEY

Ankara, 30 March 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION TURKEY 2017-2018 REPORT⁷⁶

1. Introduction

The period of this report is from April 2017 until March 2018 and covers all locations in Turkey where Schengen countries issue visas, namely Ankara, Istanbul, Edirne and Izmir.⁷⁷ The representation of Schengen states remained the same.⁷⁸ All MS States except Slovakia are outsourcing their visa application service.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

The Local Schengen Cooperation (LSC) meetings were well attended. The average attendance of the Schengen countries was as follows:

- **In general:** 83,34%
- **In Ankara:** 84,34%
- **In Istanbul:** 82,35%

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.

During the reporting period 11 regular LSC meetings were held: five in Ankara and six in Istanbul.

- 3rd May 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 12th June 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 13th June 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 12th September 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 13th September 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 24th October 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;

⁷⁶ April 2017 – March 2018

⁷⁷ Turkish citizens also have the possibility to apply for a visa in Bursa, Gaziantep and Antalya for Italy and Germany at an ESP (External Service Provider)

⁷⁸ **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 an 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).

- 26th October 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 5th December 2017, LSC meeting in Ankara;
- 11th December 2017, LSC meeting in Istanbul;
- 6th March 2018, LSC in Ankara;
- 13th March 2018, LSC meeting in Istanbul;

The EUD included MS' Missions in Edirne and Izmir (General Consulates) in the LSC mailing list and shared the minutes and statistics with all Schengen consulate locations in Turkey. The consular staff of Schengen States in other locations was also free to participate in LSC meetings organized in Ankara and Istanbul.

Reports/minutes were composed by the EUD. The MS have been encouraged to share them with their central authorities.

Meetings were chaired by the EUD. Estonia was representing the LCC members as part of the rotating Presidency of the Council in the second semester of 2017 and Bulgaria in the first semester of 2018.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code – April 2017-March 2018

Given the number of visas issued and the geopolitical importance of the EU-Turkey relationship, the LSC is considered an important platform for the exchange of information and experience 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 investigate those discrepancies in search of a harmonised approach towards implementing the Visa Code.

The study was finalised and is being prepared for publishing. The format and forum of the Study are yet to be clarified.

3.2 Assessment of the need for common VFS audits and a common approach on issuing multiple entry visas

After several discussions, 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 formed and a meeting were held 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 its concern that its central authority shall not recognize the results of audits conducted by other countries.

Even though no common audit has been conducted up to date, the network is of the opinion that it is a very useful exercise, which should be implemented at a time of earliest convenience.

Concerning the common approach to issuing multiple entry visas to Turkish nationals, the working group should work on harmonizing the disparate practices currently implemented. DG Home supports these endeavours.

3.3. Exchange of information

Monthly statistical data has been collected by each MS consulate/embassy location, which has been done 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 network's 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 have been put on hold due to a 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 businesspersons, 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.

Slovakia is the last MS to be finalising procedures for outsourcing visa applications to an external service provider. The date for starting operations is yet to be defined.

EUD organised four Document Security Training sessions in Istanbul in order to train Visa staff at General Consulates on different aspects of document control, especially in light of the EU-Turkey Agreement and the current high influx of refugees into Turkey. The trainings took place at the German Consulate General in Istanbul and were conducted by the German and Austrian document advisers Mr. Ringo Bruhn, Mr. Gerhard Bogner and Mr. Andre Nowotnick.

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 corroborate the accuracy of the documents. Additionally, the events served as networking opportunities for consular staff of different Schengen MS. The overall reception of these trainings has been very positive.

In total 90 persons were trained at four sessions:

- 29.01.2018
- 07.02.2018
- 12.02.2018
- 05.03.2018

Since April 2017 several MS reported an increasing number of Syrians who have been granted asylum in the EU claiming their travel document to be stolen or lost. Different stories told by those persons attracted the attention of the whole LSC network. Following the decision made at the LSC network meeting on 13.09.2017 in Istanbul, a meeting was organised at the German Consulate General in Istanbul on 26.10.2017 to discuss the phenomena of registered refugees of MS reporting their refugee travel document stolen or lost in Turkey.

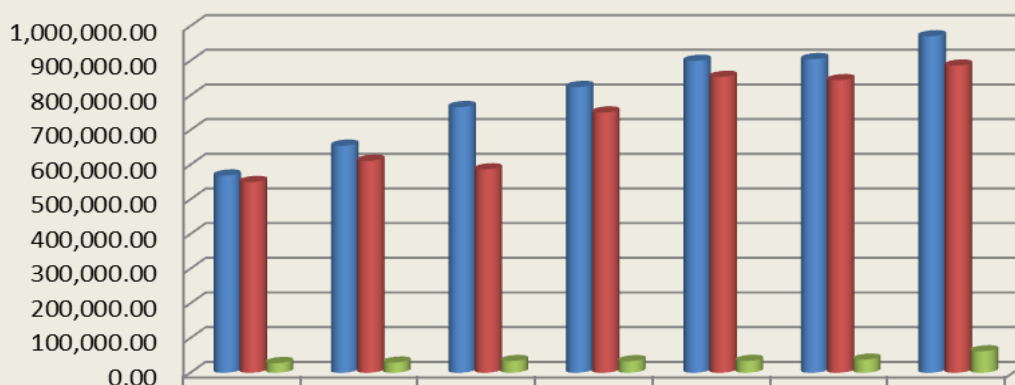
The EUD sent out a questionnaire to all MS for information gathering purposes. It was agreed the results will be sent to MoFA in order to request the crosschecking of the data with TR entry and exit lists.

All necessary information was gathered, but the consent of some MS is missing to hand over the data to TR authorities due to their national Data protection law. The EUD is planning to continue the process as soon as consent of all MS is obtained.

3.5 Miscellaneous

The LSC network anticipated a significant rise of VISA applications and refusal rates since the coup attempt in Turkey that took place on 15th of July 2016.

C-VISA Statistics Turkey 2011-2017



■ C-VISA applied	568917	655205	766610	824432	899851	904810	970744
■ C-VISA issued	550338	611562	586848	750968	853724	844073	886174
■ C-VISA not issued	28007	29383	33811	33353	34129	38009	61924

The number of C-Visas applied for has increased by 7%. This increase is within the normal increase rates by year and cannot be seen in relation to the mentioned happening. The numbers are within the usual increase rate of the past years.

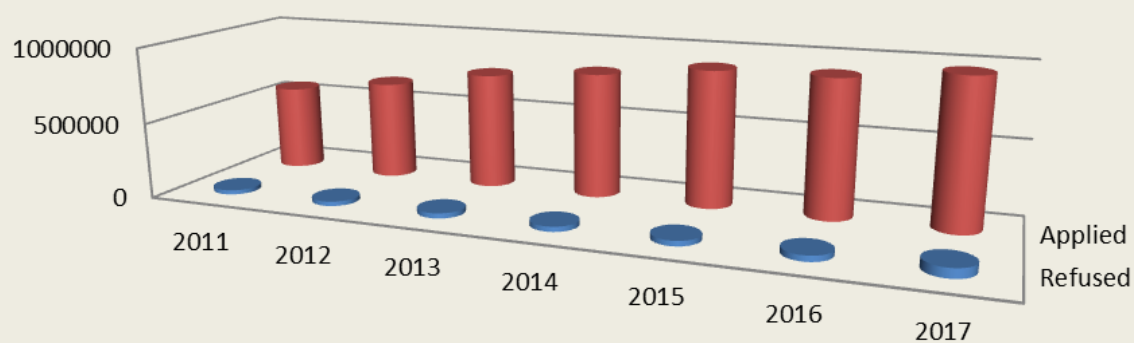
3.5.2. Refusal Rate

The refusal rate increased significantly. We could monitor a rise of refusals compared to 2016 of:

Ankara	67%
Istanbul	66%
Izmir	10%
Edirne	66%
Total Turkey	52%

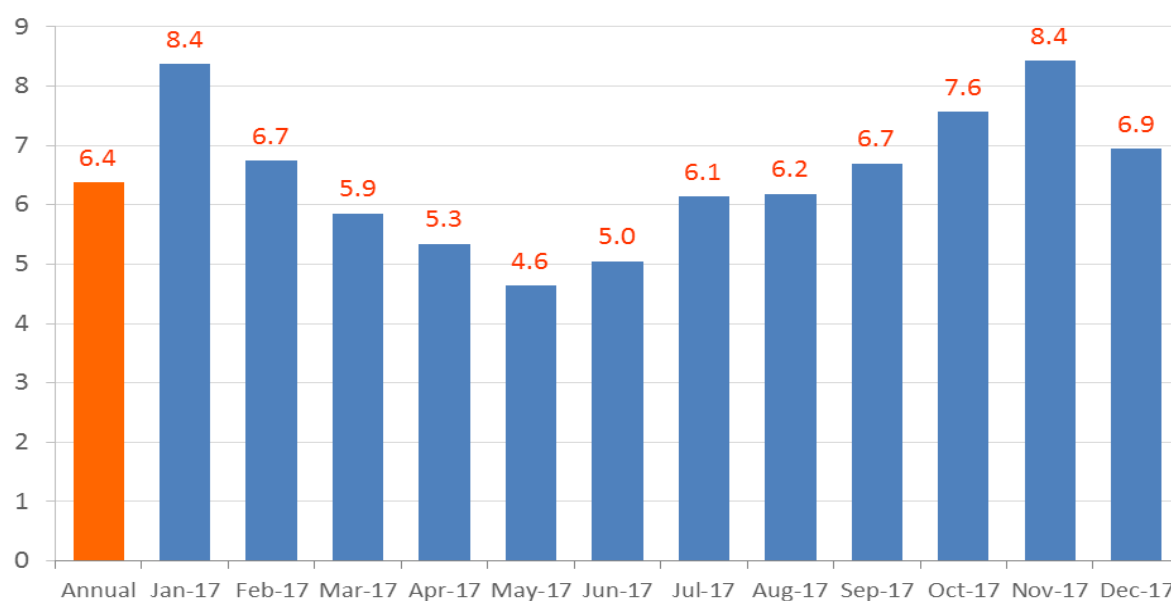
The reasons behind this phenomenon were discussed at several meetings of the LSC network. It was concluded the rise of refusal rates is due to the increase in low quality applications that pose a high risk for irregular migration. More fake or falsified supporting documents have been observed within this period. Applications of 3rd country nationals like Syria and Iraqi have not significantly influenced the refusal rate.

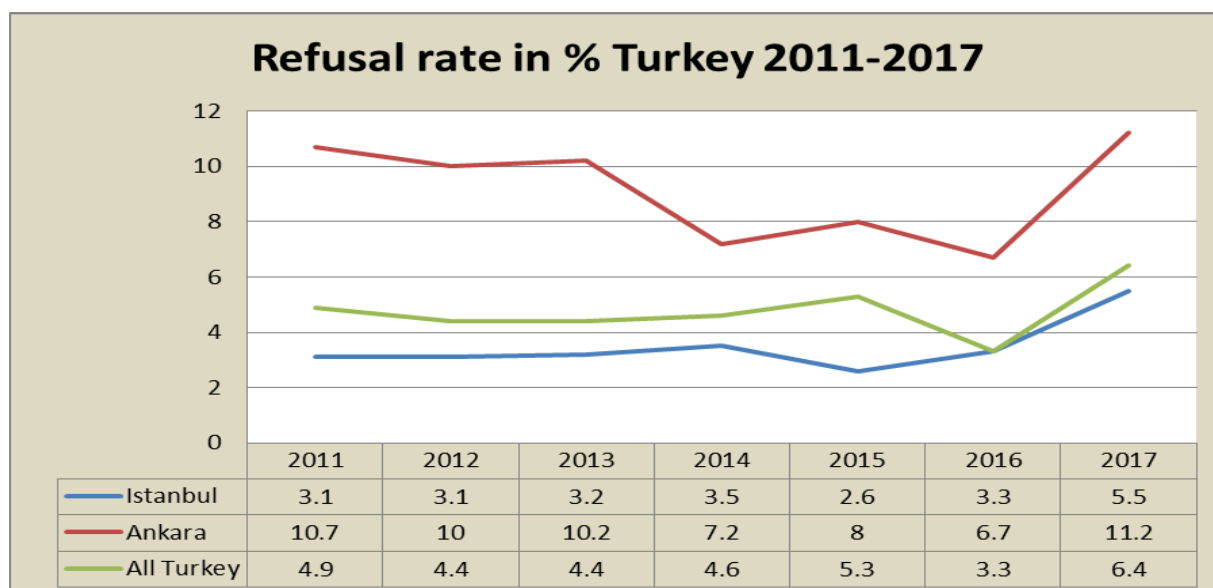
Applied vs. refused VISA applications Turkey 2011-2016



	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
■ Refused	28007	29383	33811	33353	34129	38009	61924
■ Applied	568917	655204	766601	824432	899851	904810	970744

2017 Visa Refusal Rate (%) for All Countries

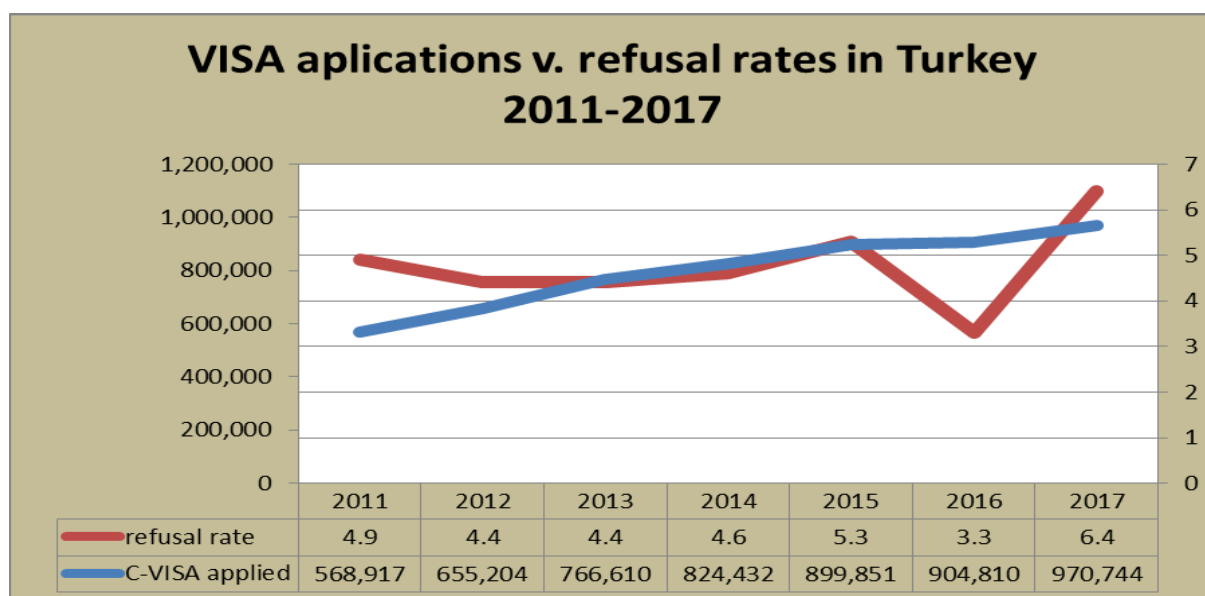




The network will monitor this development closely.

4. Challenges in 2017-2018

Following the coup attempt a rise in emigration attempts to EU MS by educated Turkish families has been observed and reported in the previous annual report. The forecasted continuations of this phenomenon due to the political developments in the country have come true, and are to continue in the foreseeable future. The network will closely monitor the developments in this area. In this context, all countries reported a general increase in refusal rates of visa applications in 2017.



The Initiatives "common approach on issuing long-term VISA" and "Common VFS audits" have been launched in the beginning of 2017 and the EUD will work closely with the MS in order to come to a common conclusion in this regard.

The LSC in Turkey will continue to harmonize its implementation of the Visa Code, as well as will closely follow the VLD process until the realization of VISA Liberalization is achieved.

Turkey Total

SCHENGEN VISA STATISTICS													
2017													
Country	C visas applied for	C visas issued	C visas multiple-entry issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued	A visas applied for	A visas issued	A visas multiple-entry issued	A visas not issued	Total applied for	Total Issued	Total Not Issued	Refusal Rate in %
Austria	21,373	18,888	8,877	186	1,666	-	-	-	-	21,373	18,888	1,666	7.8
Belgium	11,585	9,786	661	15	1,488	-	-	-	-	11,585	9,786	1,488	12.8
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech	17,937	16,641	5,448	-	1,229	-	-	-	-	17,937	16,641	1,229	6.9
Denmark	8,759	7,226	4,930	4	1,136	-	-	-	-	8,759	7,226	1,136	13.0
Estonia	1,085	1,030	714	34	56	-	-	-	-	1,085	1,030	56	5.2
Finland	4,084	3,374	2,974	36	441	-	-	-	-	4,084	3,374	441	10.8
France	136,954	128,690	36,137	2,818	6,414	-	-	-	-	136,954	128,690	6,414	4.7
Germany	245,864	203,336	175,015	13,640	26,225	-	-	-	-	245,864	203,336	26,225	10.7
Greece	198,390	194,349	175,864	112	3,758	-	-	-	-	198,390	194,349	3,758	1.9
Hungary	21,119	20,207	15,485	5	688	-	-	-	-	21,119	20,207	688	3.3
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	129,910	125,435	101,913	335	4,659	-	-	-	-	129,910	125,435	4,659	3.6
Latvia	1,589	1,450	948	25	104	-	-	-	-	1,589	1,450	104	6.5
Lithuania	1,337	1,205	747	-	142	-	-	-	-	1,337	1,205	142	10.6
Luxembourg	1,555	1,502	1,444	430	53	-	-	-	-	1,555	1,502	53	3.4
Malta	4,242	3,897	2,395	592	283	-	-	-	-	4,242	3,897	283	6.7
Netherlands	73,514	66,555	48,777	50	6,641	-	-	-	-	73,514	66,555	6,641	9.0
Norway	1,795	1,371	-	1,669	408	-	-	-	-	1,795	1,371	408	22.7
Poland	8,915	8,316	6,585	2	596	-	-	-	-	8,915	8,316	596	6.7
Portugal	1,078	971	452	5	45	-	-	-	-	1,078	971	45	4.2
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	1,402	1,344	951	1	44	-	-	-	-	1,402	1,344	44	3.1
Slovenia	1,387	1,114	-	-	271	-	-	-	-	1,387	1,114	271	19.5
Spain	45,199	42,035	32,207	356	2,022	-	-	-	-	45,199	42,035	2,022	4.5
Sweden	14,991	13,514	8,992	14	1,717	-	-	-	-	14,991	13,514	1,717	11.5
Switzerland	16,710	13,938	9,300	275	1,838	-	-	-	-	16,710	13,938	1,838	11.0
Total	970,774	886,174	640,816	20,604	61,924	-	-	-	-	970,774	886,174	61,924	6.4
Average per country	35,955	32,821	23,734	763	2,293	-	-	-	-	35,955	32,821	2,293	6.4

SCHENGEN VISA STATISTICS		2017										Ankara	
Country	C visas applied for	C visas issued	C visas multiple-entry issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued	A visas applied for	A visas issued	A visas multiple-entry issued	A visas not issued	Total applied for	Total Issued	Total Not Issued	Refusal Rate in %
Austria	8,927	7,948	1,110	2	803	-	-	-	-	8,927	7,948	803	9.0
Belgium	5,738	4,301	661	15	1,286	-	-	-	-	5,738	4,301	1,286	22.4
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech	10,465	9,985	5,112	-	421	-	-	-	-	10,465	9,985	421	4.0
Denmark	4,419	3,243	1,744	4	964	-	-	-	-	4,419	3,243	964	21.8
Estonia	1,085	1,030	714	34	56	-	-	-	-	1,085	1,030	56	5.2
Finland	4,084	3,374	2,974	36	441	-	-	-	-	4,084	3,374	441	10.8
France	27,813	25,145	3,831	2,758	1,693	-	-	-	-	27,813	25,145	1,693	6.1
Germany	74,758	51,605	39,345	6,912	10,563	-	-	-	-	74,758	51,605	10,563	14.1
Greece	7,649	7,363	7,147	58	226	-	-	-	-	7,649	7,363	226	3.0
Hungary	5,142	4,472	2,871	-	169	-	-	-	-	5,142	4,472	169	3.3
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	11,715	11,394	11,246	3	321	-	-	-	-	11,715	11,394	321	2.7
Latvia	1,589	1,450	948	25	104	-	-	-	-	1,589	1,450	104	6.5
Lithuania	1,337	1,205	747	-	142	-	-	-	-	1,337	1,205	142	10.6
Luxembourg	1,555	1,502	1,444	430	53	-	-	-	-	1,555	1,502	53	3.4
Malta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	22,182	19,082	13,160	13	2,990	-	-	-	-	22,182	19,082	2,990	13.5
Norway	1,795	1,371	-	1,669	408	-	-	-	-	1,795	1,371	408	22.7
Poland	3,138	2,922	2,584	-	198	-	-	-	-	3,138	2,922	198	6.3
Portugal	1,078	971	452	5	45	-	-	-	-	1,078	971	45	4.2
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	396	383	237	-	15	-	-	-	-	396	383	15	3.8
Slovenia	1,387	1,114	-	-	271	-	-	-	-	1,387	1,114	271	19.5
Spain	11,002	9,016	1,199	337	1,548	-	-	-	-	11,002	9,016	1,548	14.1
Sweden	6,054	4,727	2,171	-	1,161	-	-	-	-	6,054	4,727	1,161	19.2
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	213,308	173,603	99,697	12,301	23,878	-	-	-	-	213,308	173,603	23,878	11.2
Average per country	7,900	6,430	3,692	456	884	-	-	-	-	7,900	6,430	884	11.2

SCHENGEN VISA STATISTICS		2017								Istanbul			
Country	C visas applied for	C visas issued	C visas multiple-entry issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued	A visas applied for	A visas issued	A visas multiple-entry issued	A visas not issued	Total applied for	Total Issued	Total Not Issued	Refusal Rate in %
Austria	12,446	10,940	7,767	184	863	-	-	-	-	12,446	10,940	863	6.9
Belgium	5,847	5,485	-	-	202	-	-	-	-	5,847	5,485	202	3.5
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech	7,472	6,656	336	-	808	-	-	-	-	7,472	6,656	808	10.8
Denmark	4,340	3,983	3,186	-	172	-	-	-	-	4,340	3,983	172	4.0
Estonia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	109,141	103,545	32,306	60	4,721	-	-	-	-	109,141	103,545	4,721	4.3
Germany	131,336	114,869	114,243	2,298	13,206	-	-	-	-	131,336	114,869	13,206	10.1
Greece	102,248	100,002	85,460	43	2,095	-	-	-	-	102,248	100,002	2,095	2.0
Hungary	15,977	15,735	12,614	5	519	-	-	-	-	15,977	15,735	519	3.2
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	99,233	95,507	76,743	332	3,609	-	-	-	-	99,233	95,507	3,609	3.6
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malta	4,242	3,897	2,395	592	283	-	-	-	-	4,242	3,897	283	6.7
Netherlands	51,332	47,473	35,617	37	3,651	-	-	-	-	51,332	47,473	3,651	7.1
Norway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poland	5,777	5,394	4,001	2	398	-	-	-	-	5,777	5,394	398	6.9
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	1,006	961	714	1	29	-	-	-	-	1,006	961	29	2.9
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	34,197	33,019	31,008	19	474	-	-	-	-	34,197	33,019	474	1.4
Sweden	8,937	8,787	6,821	14	556	-	-	-	-	8,937	8,787	556	6.2
Switzerland	16,710	13,938	9,300	275	1,838	-	-	-	-	16,710	13,938	1,838	11.0
Total	610,241	570,191	422,511	3,862	33,424	-	-	-	-	610,241	570,191	33,424	5.5
Average per country	22,602	21,118	15,649	143	1,238	-	-	-	-	22,602	21,118	1,238	5.5

SCHENGEN VISA STATISTICS		2017											Izmir
Country	C visas applied for	C visas issued	C visas multiple-entry issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued	A visas applied for	A visas issued	A visas multiple-entry issued	A visas not issued	Total applied for	Total Issued	Total Not Issued	Refusal Rate in %
Austria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Estonia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	39,770	36,862	21,427	4,430	2,456	-	-	-	-	39,770	36,862	2,456	6.2
Greece	61,198	59,830	56,221	11	1,296	-	-	-	-	61,198	59,830	1,296	2.1
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	18,962	18,534	13,924	-	729	-	-	-	-	18,962	18,534	729	3.8
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Norway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	119,930	115,226	91,572	4,441	4,481	-	-	-	-	119,930	115,226	4,481	3.7
Average per country	4,442	4,268	3,392	164	166	-	-	-	-	4,442	4,268	166	3.7

SCHENGEN VISA STATISTICS		2017										Edirne	
Country	C visas applied for	C visas issued	C visas multiple-entry issued	LTV issued	C visas not issued	A visas applied for	A visas issued	A visas multiple-entry issued	A visas not issued	Total applied for	Total Issued	Total Not Issued	Refusal Rate in %
Austria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgium	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Estonia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
France	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greece	27,295	27,154	27,036	-	141	-	-	-	-	27,295	27,154	141	0.5
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iceland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Norway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Poland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Switzerland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	27,295	27,154	27,036	-	141	-	-	-	-	27,295	27,154	141	0.5
Average per country	1,011	1,006	1,001	-	5	-	-	-	-	1,011	1,006	5	0.5



Kampala, 30 April 2018

**Subject: LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Uganda
2017-2018 REPORT⁷⁹**

1. Introduction

10 Members States present in Kampala. For the purpose of issuing Schengen visas: The Netherlands representing Hungary, Slovenia; Norway⁸⁰ representing Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania, Switzerland, Iceland; Germany representing Austria, Estonia; Belgium, representing Luxembourg; Italy representing Malta, Slovakia; France representing Spain, Portugal, Greece.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

During the reporting period, two meetings have taken place: 15 February and 22 March 2018. They were well attended. There were no LSC meetings held in 2017⁸¹.

The LSC meetings are organised and chaired by the EU Delegation. The EU Delegation is also in charge of reporting and coordination of the follow-up steps when needed. MS are free to share the EU Delegation reports with their capitals should they so wish.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Although issues of harmonising visa fees and insurance for diplomatic/service passport holders, school exchange, cultural visits and visas connected to scientific research, cf. art. 16 S. (4) letters b, c and d, S. (5) letters a, b and c, have been raised previously, no agreement has been reached. Drawing up of a common information sheet on visas and the exchange of monthly statistics, as per art. 48, Ss (2) and (3) to be relaunched.

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

This mandatory exercise has not been carried out in Uganda (Article 48(1)(a) of the Visa Code, applicable since 2010.

Once finalised, it will be sent to the Visa Committee and adopted by COM. List becomes legally binding thereafter.

⁷⁹ April 2017 – March 2018

⁸⁰ The reception of visa applications for Norway and the countries it represents is outsourced to an external service provider, located in Kampala.

⁸¹ Last meeting held in April 2016

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

On the whole it was established that MS practices are harmonised. The length of validity of multi entry visas (MEVs) varies between MS from less than one year in some cases and 1 to 2 years in others.

3.4 Exchange of information

MS make use of the Visa Information System, as it is possible to see if a visa application has been refused already. However, VIS-mail is not used among the MS in Uganda as a means of communication.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

N/A

4. Challenges

Regular meetings to be relaunched to address common issues and benefit from further exchanges of information.

5. Other issues

N/A



25/04/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) IN UKRAINE 2017-2018 REPORT⁸²

1. Introduction

Present in Kyiv: Republic of Austria, *Republic of Bulgaria*, Kingdom of Belgium⁸³, *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 Italy⁸⁴, Republic of Latvia, Republic of Lithuania, Kingdom of the Netherlands, Kingdom of Norway⁸⁵, 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 2017-2018

The **EU Delegation** is in charge of the coordination and chairing of regular LSC meetings.

- Number of regular meetings held during the reporting period: 8

⁸² April 2017 – March 2018.

⁸³ Covering Luxembourg on visa matters.

⁸⁴ Covering Malta on visa matters.

⁸⁵ Covering Iceland on visa matters.

- Meetings were well attended. Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania regularly join the LSC meetings.
- At some meetings guest speakers from relevant state authorities were invited (e.g. State Border Guards Service, State Migration Service etc.).
- Sharing common reports with capitals: YES.
- Coordination with consulates in locations outside the capital is ensured through respective MS Embassies. Consulates located outside Kyiv regularly report on issued Schengen visas.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Visa Code is applied by Member States in accordance with national instructions.

LSC meetings are mainly dedicated to the coordination and harmonization of existing practices. The introduction of the visa-free regime for Ukraine revealed some issues that required broader discussion and harmonization of existing practices among Member States, notably the cases of Ukrainian citizens holding both biometric and non-biometric passports.

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

As of 15 May 2014 a list of supporting documents is fully operational in Ukraine.

The Embassy of the Republic of Poland signalled the possible need to amend the list of supporting documents by adding "shopping" as an additional reason of travel. However, after the visa liberalization with Ukraine came into force, further discussion on this subject lost its practical importance.

Currently Schengen MS do not see a need to amend the existing list.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

Member States do not notify any problems with the application of a harmonized list of supporting documents in practice.

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.

However, some discrepancy can be observed in visa-issuing practices among Member States. This is particularly the case in the area of multiple entry visas (MEVs), as total figures reported locally by each Member States vary substantially.

3.4 Exchange of information

Visa statistics are provided by Member States, compiled by the EU Delegation, and presented during LSC meetings on a quarterly basis.

The exchange of information also covers implementation of the Visa Information System, use of VIS Mail, cases of fraud, travel medical insurance etc.

Member States provide presentations on their laws regarding national visas that could potentially impact on other Schengen countries.

The EU Delegation regularly invites representatives of local authorities (e.g. State Border Guard Service, State Migration Service etc.) to discuss practical implications of the visa liberalisation. Information regarding handling of the visa applications from permanent residents of the illegally annexed Crimea is shared regularly within the group.

4. Challenges

The main challenge throughout the reporting period emerged from the introduction of **the visa liberalization**, which had a significant impact on the activities of the Member States' visa sections/departments. The number of visa applications decreased by an average of 48.5%, with many MS experiencing declines of over 50% y-o-y. A number of MS had to reduce the number of staff of respective consular sections, both expatriate and local, and assign new tasks or relocate it elsewhere. Other MS assigned the existing staff to other tasks, while another group of MS kept the same number of staff.

Several MS have reported an increase in numbers of overstays and working without a work permits. The fact that the current Ukrainian legislation allows citizens to hold two passports is considered a potential risk factor which may trigger misuse of the visa liberalisation. The irregular migration trends will be thoroughly monitored during the upcoming period in line with commitments by Ukraine to continue to implement the visa liberalization benchmarks, and also in light of the recommendations contained in the First Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council under the Visa Suspension Mechanism.

The LSC group has a comprehensive knowledge about cases of forgery of supporting documents and cooperates in this area with the local authorities. MS have seen an increase in Ukrainians being misled by a number of service providers' intermediaries. The increase mainly concerns residence permits and national visas and documents allegedly issued by MS. The Ukrainian State Migration Service has also been involved in an alleged corruption case connected to granting Ukrainian citizenship to non-Ukrainians. The LSC group closely follows the ongoing investigation.

The work of external service providers (ESP) unfolds in a highly professional manner. MS have not announced their intention to stop using external service providers as a result of the visa liberalization. On the contrary, some MS have deepened their cooperation with the ESPs.

The **illegal annexation** by the Russian Federation 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 activities of Schengen MS. As the Russian Federation issues foreign travel documents to permanent residents of Crimea also using facilities elsewhere than in Crimea, the tracking of the identifiers remains a challenge. Issues concerning applicants residing in Crimea are addressed regularly by the MS.

Another major challenge for the current reporting period as well as looking ahead is how to apply a harmonized policy towards the supporting documents issued by the non-recognized entities in the **non-Ukrainian controlled areas in Donbas**. In February 2017, the Russian President signed an executive order that recognizes 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. Supporting documents by non-recognized entities have not been presented as frequently as expected, but the issue should not be underestimated as it also bears a significant political sensitivity. A number of MS have decided to accept applications containing documents issued by the so-called "Peoples' Republics" without giving the documents any value in the application process. Several MS reject any application containing documents issued by the so-called "Peoples' Republics", and which is not a humanitarian case.

The situation with **internally displaced people (IDPs)** and people affected by the conflict in the East of Ukraine remains difficult and MS closely monitor the migration patterns in Ukraine. In February 2018 the Ministry of Social Policy reported 1.5 million officially registered IDPs. Despite these high figures, the intention of Ukrainian citizens to enter the EU irregularly remains very low. Out of almost 707,000 asylum applications in the EU+ countries in 2017, only 10,278 originated from Ukraine (cf. EASO), which is a decrease compared to 2016 (12,426). Despite the visa liberalization there are currently no indications that Ukraine's asylum patterns will significantly change. This is in line with the analysis made in the last LSC annual report. The IDPs situation in Ukraine did not influence MSs' policies for issuing Schengen visas to Ukrainian applicants. In 2017 the Schengen visas refusal rate remained as low as 3.7%, compared to 8.2% world average.

5. Other issues

An EU-financed nationwide communication campaign "Open Europe" was launched on 11 May 2017, with the aim to raise awareness locally about the rules and the opportunities offered by the visa-free travel and to promote mobility between Ukraine and the EU.

A dedicated information website www.openeurope.in.ua was launched as the main platform of the campaign. During the first 10 months, the site has been visited by 550 thousand individual users.

In addition, the campaign used various channels of mass communication, including activities in social networks, with a total outreach of 7 million people, more than 200 reports in the media, advertising flights at underground and malls in densely populated cities (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Lviv), advertising in large-scale outdoor events etc.

Cooperation with state agencies ensured distribution of over 25 thousand posters in public reception offices of state institutions in all 24 regions of Ukraine, 200 city-lights in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Lviv, 40 billboards in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Lviv. In parallel, thanks to cooperation with business companies, such as mobile operators, insurance companies, and banks, "Open Europe" information materials have reached an audience of 17 million people

The results of a dedicated survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in December 2017 as commissioned by "Open Europe" confirmed that, compared to early 2017, the number of Ukrainians aware of the basic rules of the EU visa-free travel regime doubled.

In 2018 the information campaign will focus on activities aimed to inform the Ukrainian audience about the possibilities of budget travel and seasonal recreation in the EU.

Member States contributed to the project during LSC meetings by offering substantial feedback and fostering discussions and exchanges of ideas to further develop the information campaign.

The present Report has been approved by the Embassies of EU Member States and Schengen Associated States.

Prepared jointly by the Embassy of France, Embassy of Poland, Embassy of Sweden and the EU Delegation



May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) – UNITED KINGDOM (LONDON)

2017-2018 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 2017 was 234 979 which is an increase of 4.7 % compared to 2016.

2. LSC meetings held in 2016-2017

Since the last reporting period two meetings have been held (chaired by COM (DG HOME) and meetings are generally very well attended. Reports are drawn up by DG HOME after each meeting. Despite this Member States continue not could to make use of the operational conclusions drawn and clarifications of implementation of the Visa Code and, in particular, the Directive 2004/38/EC as repetitive questions on the same subjects continue to be raised.

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. The interaction between Directive 2004/38/EC on the free movement of family members of EU citizens is 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

N/a

4. Challenges

Increasing volumes of applications throughout the year is not matched by corresponding increase of consulates' decision making staff.



EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The Head of Delegation

Washington, 2 May 2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in Washington, DC, USA 2017-2018 REPORT⁸⁶

1. Introduction

All EU Member States are present in Washington, DC, as well as Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. 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.

For the purpose of LSC in Washington, Estonia is represented by its consular post 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. Some consulates (Netherlands, as Regional Support Office⁸⁷, Estonia, Luxembourg⁸⁸) 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, Portugal, 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). France started in April 2018 (after the reporting period) and intends to cover its 10 consular posts in the US by July 2018. Slovenia and Austria are considering it.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017—2018

Two meetings were held in October 2017 and January 2018, and were attended by half of the member states on average, less than in the previous reporting period. The meetings were chaired by the EU Delegation and the reports were drawn up by the EU Delegation. They were organized back-to-back with a consular cooperation meeting to maximize participation. This approach will be repeated when appropriate. 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

⁸⁶ April 2017 – March 2018

⁸⁷ The Netherlands Regional Support Office in Washington issues visa for visa requiring citizens based in **all** countries in the Western Hemisphere

⁸⁸ Luxembourg issues visas in Washington DC for citizens based in Canada, Mexico, and, in exceptional cases, for some countries of Central and Latin America.

No particular issues were discussed by the group over the reporting period with regards to the consistent application of the visa code.

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. The Delegation approached several Member States issuing Airport Transit Visas to enquire about their practices with regards to applicants holding US forms I-512 and I-797 (which could technically allow them to return to the US, according to USCBP information guide for transportation carriers). Member States confirmed that these individuals are indeed issued ATVs, in accordance with the annex of the visa code, and did not suggest reviewing the annex.

3.3 Harmonisation of practices

On the basis of the discussion with Member States present at the meeting where this issue was discussed, it appeared that most member states issue a **majority of their Multiple Entry Visas for 1 year**, the range being from 6 months up to 3 years (with possible exceptions). Member States stressed that the purpose of the trip and the previous knowledge of the applicant by the consulate (bona fide travellers) were determining factors, and noted that decisions were in any event taken on a case by case basis.

3.4 Exchange of information

Member States exchanged on their experiences with regards to the outsourcing of visa applications to external service providers (ESPs), the use of which has grown over the reporting period.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Member States discussed the issue of citizens apprehended by US immigration authorities whose identity documents are kept in custody of the US authorities pending the resolution of their case, and agreed to follow up with US authorities and in the framework of the local consular cooperation working group. They also discussed asylum applications as several Member States noted that they received a number of letters, every year, from inmates asking for asylum. All requests were deemed inadmissible. Some Member States stressed that their practice was not to accept asylum applications which were not lodged at the border. Others also pointed out that they considered the US as a “safe country” (as per the Geneva Convention).

4. Challenges

Washington LSC has reached cruising speed and the frequency of LSC meetings in Washington has been reduced to once per semester, unless urgent needs emerge. Over the last years, the exchange of information remains the area where the group has provided the biggest added value, and should be further encouraged including out of the Beltway.

5. Other issues

This report was endorsed by all Member States present in Washington DC.



30/05/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) Uzbekistan 2017-2018 REPORT⁸⁹

1. Introduction

Currently the Republic of Uzbekistan hosts 8 diplomatic missions issuing Schengen visa -Czech Republic, France (representing Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal), Germany (representing Sweden, Spain, Finland, Austria), Hungary, Italy (representing Greece, Malta, Slovenia, Norway), Latvia (representing Estonia, Lithuania, Switzerland), Poland, Slovakia and 3 missions applying the Schengen policy (Bulgaria Romania, Switzerland). At the end of June 2017 Hungary opened Embassy in Tashkent (and consequently started issuing visas as well). On 21 July 2017 Spain decided to open a visa office in Tashkent to collect visa application locally (it is supervised by the Consulate in Moscow). There have been no further changes in representation arrangements in comparison to last year. There are no Schengen visa consulates outside of the capital Tashkent. All Schengen embassies have been using VIS since its introduction in Uzbekistan on 14/11/2013 but continue to experience technical problems with quality of prints, sharing of information and the introduction of new Uzbek travel documents (see section 4. Challenges).

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

LSC group continued to hold **regular coordination meetings** and met 3 times during the reporting period. The meetings are normally attended by most of embassies issuing Schengen visas in Tashkent and in some cases also by representatives of the Romanian and Bulgarian Embassies. EU Delegation prepares agenda, chairs the meetings and drafts meeting reports. Members of the group maintain regular email contact. They also meet during the regular meetings of the Consul Club which brings together all Consuls performing their duties in Tashkent. Occasionally FR organises informal meetings to discuss current Schengen related issues.

The coordination meetings in the reporting period were focused on the list of visa supporting documents, implementation of the Visa Code and challenges faced by individual embassies.

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

The Visa Code was successfully implemented in Uzbekistan. The LSC members have finalized the harmonized list of visa supporting documents already in 2014 (adopted via Commission implementing decision on 4/9/2014).

⁸⁹ This report has been agreed with LSC members.

UZB side persistently submits requests to grant the VIP treatment (visa issuance) to the personalities that do not fit the requirements of this procedure (according to Visa Code). Those applicants are requested to proceed according to ordinary procedures.

There has been a good ad-hoc support of the EU Delegation from HQ – it would be useful to combine such support with a *practical more in-depth training focused on consular issues and implementation of the Visa Code* for relevant delegation staff. EU MS consular staff would also benefit from *FRONTEX training on detecting falsified documents* that had been organized in other parts of the CIS.

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

The LSC members have finalized the harmonized list of visa supporting documents already in 2014 (adopted via Commission implementing decision on 4/9/2014). The existing list of supporting documents is sufficient for the time being.

3.3 Harmonization practices

Harmonization practices are usually discussed within the frames of meetings mentioned above. The average length of multiple entry visas issued in Tashkent was 1 year. Visas with longer validity are issued very rarely.

3.4 Exchange of information

There is a sufficient exchange of information among member states related primarily to the following issues; shopping/abuse of issued visa, introduction of new practices for issuance of visa (e.g. use of electronic lines or external service providers), visa refusals and general warnings on visa frauds. EU Delegation collects and shares visa statistics (bi-annually) and also contributes to the exchange of information by disseminating relevant information received from Brussels.

3.5 Any other initiative taken in LSC

The contact list of MS representations and representation agreements is being regularly updated by MS and EUD. Additionally FR initiated informal meetings to briefly discuss current problems faced by particular Embassies.

4. Challenges

The roll out of VIS system and the introduction of new Uzbek travel documents (EIU common list needs to be updated) are still perceived by majority of LSC as main hiccups they face on a daily basis. Some visa supporting documents continue to pose a challenge – e.g. applicants are not always able to demonstrate sufficient credit card or bank account history (currently 3 months required). References from the place of work, medical certificates, invitations, deserve a special attention as there have been numerous attempts to forge it. Embassies in these cases decide on case by case basis whether or not to issue visa. That obviously requires conducting separate interviews which ultimately is a very time consuming task, decreasing effectiveness of particular visa sections.

Introduction of VIS has been a positive step – it provides reasonable amount of information about applicants and their history with other Schengen embassies. As time passes, the amount of available information about applicants will be further expanded and the value of the system will further increase. The embassies, however, continue to face problem with the *quality of prints taken for VIS* (30 per cent are too poor to register – usually applies to individuals above the age of 50). The embassies also continue to have *problems with sharing of VIS files* as data about country of origin of those born before the collapse of the Soviet Union differ from one embassy to another (some embassies use ex-USSR while others use Uzbekistan). This then prevents access of embassies using "ex-USSR" access to files of applicants that have already given finger prints in embassies using "Uzbekistan" and vice-versa.

Some MS noticed there has been rapidly growing number of visa applications in their respective visa sections which may ultimately result in serious problems (longer queues) as the demand for Schengen visas exceeds the capacity of those particular Embassies.

Finally the growing number of illegal Uzbek migrant workers was noticed (usually young uneducated men in small groups), who want to get into the Schengen area applying for touristic visa, with false, fake or incorrect supporting documents, usually prepared by diverse (travel) agencies.

5. Other issues

Not applicable.



19/4/2018

LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) HANOI (VIETNAM)
2017-2018 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, in some cases:

- Finland: Outsourced collection of applications to VFS in May 2017 both in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.
- Austria: Outsourced collection of applications to VFS in May 2017 both in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.
- Spain: Outsourced collection of applications to BLS International both in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City.
- Other Member states are planning to outsource their collection of applications in the future.

Coordination of meetings: EUDEL.

2. LSC meetings held From April 2017 to March 2018

Number of meetings held: 4 (22/6/2017, 5/10/2016, 7/12/2017, 8/2/2018) + Anti Fraud meeting on 19/4/2017. With participation of non Schengen Embassies.

Attendance: Well attended.

Chair: EUDEL

Number of regular meetings held: 4

Ad hoc meetings: 1

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 Application of the Visa Code

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 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 group is collecting statistics for the period 2017-2018

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

Anti-fraud meeting (19/4/2017): The meeting, not an initiative by the Schengen group, but organized by UK, US and DE, provided a useful forum to share information and of the problematic presented by the current migratory situation in Vietnam, especially fraud, illegal migration.

The meeting was attended by several EUMS, Australia, USA, Norway, Singapore, Korea, and Canada.



06/07/2018

**LOCAL SCHENGEN COOPERATION (LSC) in ZAMBIA
2017-2018 REPORT⁹⁰**

1. Introduction

There are six Schengen Member States Embassies present in Zambia: the Czech Republic, 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.

During the reporting period, three Member States' Embassies issued 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 started issuing visas for applicants from Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi in May 2018.

2. LSC meetings held in 2017-2018

Between April 2017 and March 2018, four LSC meetings were organized (in June, August, November and February). The meetings were usually well attended by those Member States (MS) present in Zambia, with only one MS that very rarely attends. They were usually also joined by a representative from the Embassy of Norway in Malawi.

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.

⁹⁰ April 2017 – March 2018

3. State of play

3.1 Application of the Visa Code

Regular meetings and contacts via e-mail and phone provide relevant opportunities for carrying out the tasks requested from the Local Schengen Cooperation under the Visa Code. The LSC meetings deal with operational issues in relation to the application of the common visa policy.

Over the reporting period, MS have further improved on the fulfilment of certain tasks beyond the physical LSC meetings that take place every three to four months, e.g. by more regular exchange via email and phone on specific cases of irregularities or on local travel documents.

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

Thanks to the joint work of the LSC since 2015, the harmonised list of supporting documents for Zambia entered into force on 29 September 2017. The implementation by MS has been jointly monitored and was discussed at the two subsequent LSC meetings in November and February. MS agree that the introduction of the harmonised list was a very positive step that has increased effectiveness and improved the quality of documents (e.g. since the harmonized list now requires applicants to submit originals only). There seems to be thus no need to amend the existing list at the moment.

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 and trends were discussed at the LSC meetings and information was compiled locally by the EU Delegation ahead of meetings;
- Fraud cases/'visa shopping' were discussed at the LSC meetings along regular exchanges on relevant trends, e.g. with regard to an increase in submissions of falsified or low-quality documents;
- An exchange on visa fees in the local currency took place at the LSC meetings and via email to take into account the fluctuation of the exchange rate EUR - Zambian Kwacha during parts of the reporting period;
- An updated list of representation arrangements was maintained by the EU Delegation, published on the EUD website and shared at each LSC meeting;
- Sharing of information received from EU HQ (e.g. centrally compiled visa statistics, information on preparations for the revision of the VIS legal basis, relevant public consultation processes) was undertaken by the EU Delegation at LSC meetings, whenever applicable.

In addition, the LSC decided to hold meetings twice per year that would include the possibility for all visa counter staff to join in order to facilitate information-sharing and exchange of best practices on day-to-day issues. The LSC meetings in August 2017 and February 2018 were successfully opened up to this wider group of staff.

3.4 Any other initiative taken in LSC

One MS experienced a power blackout for 2.5 days in December. During that time the MS asked another MS for assistance with one particular visa application for a third non-resident MS that it is representing in Zambia. As a lesson learned from this process, the LSC started an initiative among the four visa sections in Zambia (CZ, DE, IT and SE) to develop a joint list of relevant contacts from the represented Schengen countries which could facilitate future communications in these kind circumstances, especially during a blackout or other emergencies that could lead to technical failures in the affected Embassies.

4. Challenges

Response to challenges listed in the 2016-2017 report

Relations with airline companies: During the previous reporting period, two MS had 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. As a response, this issue was further discussed at each LSC meeting during the current reporting period in order to monitor whether this was an emerging trend. Fortunately, no further incidents with airline companies were reported during the reporting period; however, the LSC still agreed that a future meeting with the main airlines operating in Zambia would be helpful, e.g. to explain the sticker system and general provisions of the Visa Code.

Subjects to be addressed within the next reporting period (2018-2019)

Fraud and falsified documents: The LSC noticed an increase in numbers of submitted supporting documents that were either falsified or of very bad quality. During the reporting period, one applicant attempted to obtain a visa at two different visa sections with falsified documents, but thanks to the good collaboration between the two MS and with the Zambian Department of Immigration, the applicant was reported to the police and apprehended after the second attempt. Within the next reporting period, the LSC will further engage relevant local stakeholders to address this issue, e.g. the Department of Immigration (to work on the issue of falsified work and resident permits) and the main banks present in Zambia (to create awareness about the issue of falsified bank statements).

Increasing numbers of visa applications: The LSC visa sections have reported a trend of increasing numbers of visa applications in 2017, confirming a trend already observed for a number of years. Going forward, this could create a challenge for visa section staff. The LSC will aim to address this issue by continuing the practice of dedicated meetings that include visa section staff in order to exchange on best practices and on efficient working methods that could alleviate the work burden.

This report was drafted by the EU Delegation to Zambia in consultation with MS present in Lusaka.