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Schengen and Visa Information System on schedule

The Schengen Information System, or SIS, is the most important common search system of European police and border police authorities. It allows them to obtain information related to alerts on persons and objects and to alerts issued for the purpose of refusing entry. Therefore it is necessary to connect the new EU Member States which have acceded to the EU since 1 May 2004 to the system in order for controls at the internal borders of these countries to be abolished.

To this end, Member States' home affairs ministers decided already last December to introduce "SISone4all". This paved the way for the creation of technical prerequisites to abolish controls at internal land and sea borders of the new Member States by late December this year and controls at air borders of these countries by spring 2008 (except Cyprus). Hence, the project is given high priority both by home affairs ministers and Vice-President Frattini. For this reason, the Council was provided an update on the project today.

Federal Minister of the Interior, Dr Schäuble: "Obviously we are on schedule. The project management of 'SISone4all' is performed by Portugal. At the Council I therefore reiterated my thanks to Portugal, but also to France, for supporting the central system in Strasbourg."

Today, home affairs ministers in Luxembourg also discussed current developments of the second generation of the Schengen Information System (SIS II).

In the past, the introduction of SIS II, initially scheduled for 2007, had been

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delayed because of the system's technical complexity. Therefore, the German Presidency is making every effort to avoid further delays in realizing SIS II in line with the adapted schedule (start of the system in December 2008).

“The functional improvements related to the introduction of SIS II such as the possibility to store and submit fingerprints and photos are important innovations. Since, as an interim solution, new Member States are connected on the basis of the current Schengen Information System, the delay in introducing SIS II has no impact on the removal of internal border controls. At the moment, technical documents are being revised to achieve a stable basis for developing the system. Therefore we can now say that we have made good progress”, said Schäuble.

Regarding the introduction of the planned Visa Information System (VIS) the minister said: “The VIS is an essential tool in the fight against illegal migration, visa shopping and, last but not least, international terrorism and organized crime. Thus, the Presidency aims at concluding negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament on the VIS Regulation and the Decision on access to the VIS and at adopting the relevant legislation. For this reason, at the Council I first reported on the results of discussions which in late March I conducted together with Vice-President Frattini and the rapporteur of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs at the EU Parliament, Baroness Ludford, regarding the VIS Regulation and the Decision on access to the VIS.

I was therefore very pleased that following these discussions we reached agreement in the Council on issues which so far had been pending. This includes in particular the use of fingerprints during border controls and the extent of security authorities' access to VIS data for the purpose of fighting international terrorism and organized crime. Today's agreement allows the Presidency to immediately continue trilogue meetings with the European Parliament to reach a consensus.”