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21 September 2007

Dear Mr Jean-Louis De Brouwer

Please find enclosed the GDISC Response to the Green Paper on the Future Common European Asylum System.

As a network, we appreciate the opportunity of working closely with the European Commission and value being able respond to such important issues. We recognise the importance of such debates and look forward to continuing our role as a consultation partner on Asylum issues in the future.

Best regards,

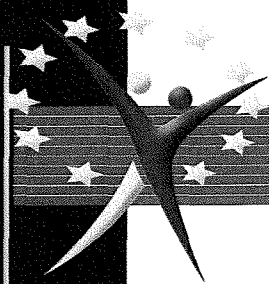


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The Hague, 14 September, 2007

GDISC response to the Green Paper on the future Common European Asylum System

The GDISC network, as an organisation that promotes practical co-operation between the Immigration Services of its 33 Member States (The 27 EU Member States, Candidate Countries - Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Green Paper on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). This response was discussed among members and many but not all have contributed to the GDISC response. As GDISC is a network of Immigration Services responsible for the implementation of asylum and migration policies, this response will mainly focus on chapter three to five of the Green Paper. As GDISC cannot speak for individual countries this response does not preclude individual national responses to the Green Paper.

As stated in the Green Paper, we are currently at the beginning of the second stage of creating a CEAS. The focus of the first stage was on the harmonisation of asylum legislation, whereas the focus within the second stage is on closer practical co-operation in order to achieve an integrative, comprehensive approach towards common standards for protection across the European Union.

GDISC, as a network for General Directors responsible for implementing asylum policies, is ideally placed to address some of the important issues set out in this Green Paper. As a network which aims to respond to changing asylum and migration objectives, GDISC has the ambition to play an important role in creating a Support Unit responsible for co-ordinating all the practical cooperation in the asylum system among the Member States. The experiences gained from the creation of such a unit could be used during further discussions on the creation of a European Support Office.

The GDISC network was created in July 2004 and is concerned with taking forward initiatives in the area of practical and operational co-operation at an international level. Since the establishment of the network in 2004, GDISC has been active in the following areas:

- Asylum
- Managed Migration
- Illegal Migration
- Management of Immigration Services

Within these areas of involvement, practical activities or projects are executed in the following ways:

- Networking and the exchange of information
- Addressing Particular Pressures
- Capacity building
- Benchmarking

GDISC recognises capacity building as an important tool to create structural improvement of Immigration Services. During the previous years, capacity building was mainly focused

on providing operational assistance to accession countries, whereas the focus has currently shifted to a more permanent improvement of both quality and professionalism of Immigration Services within Europe.

At the GDISC Annual Conference in Nuremberg in June 2007, General Directors had the opportunity to reflect on the past 3 years of the GDISC network. It was evaluated that co-operation within the network was valued as highly positive as the GDISC network combines all expertise relating to the implementation of migration and asylum policies in Europe.

Chapter three of the Green Paper: Implementation

European Support Office, the basis for extended and systematic practical co-operation between national administrations

As envisaged by the Hague Programme and outlined in the Green Paper, the transformation of structures involved in practical co-operation into a European Support Office is viewed as a positive development. The Green Paper on CEAS states that such an office could take over co-ordination of all current activities of common practical co-operation in the field of asylum. GDISC welcomes the creation of a Support Office and is prepared to act as a partner in exploring the options available in its creation and is willing to make a significant contribution to the European Support Office.

As GDISC is currently facing difficulties with regard to funding, the GDISC network is upon the request of the European Commission exploring the judicial frameworks available for acquiring a legal identity. This will allow GDISC to become an official partner for the European Commission and will help us to secure multi-annual funding for all GDISC activities and projects and sign multi-annual framework contracts.

Complex and systematic approach of GDISC projects in order to achieve higher standards in the field of asylum

1. GDISC Annual Asylum Conference: Providing an opportunity to benchmark and exchange best practices

The GDISC network has built up extensive expertise in the co-ordination of practical co-operation in the field of asylum during the past three years. GDISC organises an annual Asylum Conference for Directors of Asylum of 33 Member States allowing them to exchange experiences and to explore ways of increasing practical co-operation on asylum issues. As a result of these conferences, GDISC has set up various projects which address some of the issues outlined in the Green Paper.

2. European Asylum Curriculum: The guarantee of a high quality training system within the EU

GDISC has an ongoing project for creating the European Asylum Curriculum (EAC) for staff members of Immigration Services in Europe, who are engaged in dealing with asylum applications. The aim of the EAC, which is based on EU-Acquis and International Law, is to create a common training toolbox which contains all necessary skills and knowledge to handle an asylum case. This will ensure that staff members throughout Europe are trained in the same way and accordingly contribute to the realisation of a Common European Asylum System.

This is indeed a clear and very practical response to the need of raising both knowledge and skills in the asylum procedure that the Commission is asking for in several parts of the Green Paper. With strong support from the Commission this could be one of the most important tools for reaching conformity in the handling of asylum cases.

Chapter four of the Green Paper: Solidarity and Burden Sharing

3. Efficient external border management: Addressing Particular Pressures

At the GDISC Annual Conference which was organised from 25 to 27 June 2007 in Nuremberg, Germany, joint efforts to address Particular Pressures were recognised as a key area for further GDISC co-operation and it was agreed that GDISC would set up and implement a project in this area. GDISC is currently exploring possibilities for creating an International Support Unit, which would consist of co-ordinators from GDISC Member States responsible for different asylum/migration related topics. In co-operation with the GDISC Member States and Frontex, this unit will set up and maintain expert pools to be used whenever a country is facing a high influx of asylum applicants and is in need of support. Some GDISC countries are willing to undertake additional co-operation to address Particular Pressures. A business case and a pilot project are currently being considered and drafted.

4. Interpreters' Pool Project:

The GDISC network is currently undertaking a project of capacity sharing in the field of asylum. The Interpreters Pool project aims to provide remote interpretation during asylum interviews by means of video-conferencing equipment. This type of project addresses a particular pressure experienced by some countries (in this case a shortage of interpreters) and serves as an excellent example of the kind of practical co-operation between the GDISC Immigration Services.

5. Responsibility sharing

The GDISC network recognises the importance of the Dublin system as a system that clearly allocates responsibility for the examination of an asylum application. GDISC is interested in the outcomes of the evaluation of the Dublin system with regard to the implementation of appropriate measures within the Immigration Services.

Chapter five of the Green Paper: External dimension of asylum

6. Appropriate response to situations of vulnerability

As mentioned in the Green Paper, there is a need to enhance national capacities with regard to definition and procedures for the identification and processing vulnerable asylum applicants. These issues are currently being addressed by the GDISC network by means of two different projects. The EAC is developing two training modules on interview techniques specialised in dealing with children and interviewing techniques specialised in dealing with vulnerable groups. There will also be training in how to identify these cases.

In 2008 GDISC will organise a Migration & Crime Conference in co-operation with Europol and FRONTEX, which will focus on preventing human smuggling and illegal migration. Prior to this conference, GDISC will undertake a benchmarking study in this area. This study will help to identify the current needs, best practice and areas for further co-operation and will act as a starting point for discussion.

7. Capacity building

GDISC is currently implementing capacity building projects in third countries, such as the Ukraine and Bosnia, by building on the experience gained in the past during bilateral and Twinning projects. The added value of the involvement of the GDISC network is the participation of more partners, which contributes to the quality of implementation.

GDISC: Platform for the implementation and co-ordination of common practical co-operation

To conclude, the GDISC network recognises the importance of the issues and the constructive suggestions stated in the Green Paper. Creating an integrated practical approach to dealing with the issues of asylum and migration is one of the core values and key objectives of our network. We look forward to further and closer co-operation with the European Commission in realising the objectives set out in this Green Paper. As mentioned above, GDISC supports the creation of a common Support Office and affirms its willingness to act as a platform for implementing and co-ordinating all current activities of common practical co-operation.

On behalf of the GDISC Steering Group,

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Peter Veld', with a horizontal line underneath.

Peter Veld
GDISC Chair
General Director Immigration and Naturalisation Service, the Netherlands