

Opening Remarks – Agnès Diallo, Executive Director at eu-LISA

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“ENHANCING TRAVELLER MOBILITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION”

Good morning to all of you in the room and online. It's a real pleasure for me to be with you today and I would like to start by thanking ICAO for inviting me and for the opportunity to share with you an overview of the European Information Systems, dedicated to Border Management.

I'm Agnès Diallo, the Executive Director of eu-LISA, the European agency responsible for large-scale information systems in the field of justice and home affairs. The Agency takes care of the operations and the development of the underlying IT systems that serve the EU's vision of being an area of freedom, security and justice. eu-LISA has around 400 staff members, our headquarters are in Tallinn Estonia and our operational activities are located in Strasbourg, in France.

What I'd like to do today, is to share with you some highlights of the European Union's ambitious goal of implementing one of the world's most advanced border management system, to significantly step up the facilitation of seamless and safe international travels from and to the EU.

For almost a decade now, the evolution of border management at the EU level, has been marked by an acceleration of digitalisation and the adoption of technologies that serve two simultaneous objectives:

- One is, to make border crossings in the Schengen area simpler, smoother and faster for travellers, carriers and border guards.
- the other one, is to enable stronger security and more safety within the Schengen space.

Before we get there the core of our topic today, let's take a step back and remind ourselves of the context in which the EU's technological framework for facilitating international travel has emerged.

In 1995 the EU abolished its internal borders, as a consequence of the initial signing of the Schengen Agreement ten years earlier¹. This change made it necessary to strengthen the external borders of the Schengen area through a series of compensatory measures, noticeably

- A common visa policy, and
- shared control mechanisms for people at the Schengen area's external borders,

These new measures were first instrumented through a set of integrated IT systems, still active to date:

- **The first, is the Schengen Information System (SIS)**, that allows law enforcement and border control authorities to exchange alerts, conduct automated searches on wanted or missing people or objects, in fight against cross-border crime and terrorism.
- **The second, is the Visa Information System (VIS)**, that underlies the implementation of the common EU visa policy and the provision of visas to third-country nationals travelling to the Schengen area.
- Finally, **Eurodac** is a database of fingerprints used to manage asylum applications, and determine relative Member States responsibilities in the asylum procedure.

¹ The Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985 between FR, DE, NL, BE, LU. The same countries signed the implementing convention in 1990. Finally in 1995 FR, DE, NL, BE, LU, IT, ES, PT abolished border checks.

In 2009, the Commission and the Member States decide to professionalize the management of systems. They created eu-LISA, made it a technology operator and advisor for the EU and entrusted it with the central part of these systems.

In the mid 2010s, the EU faced a new wave of marked trends affecting its border management.

First in the form of unprecedented pressure on its borders due to large numbers of migrants fleeing notably the Syria war. At the same time, the EU also faced devastating terrorist attacks and major security threats related to the border crossing of dangerous individuals, including some with EU citizenships. In the same period, Europe was also the number 1 travelled to region in the world with more than 750 million visitors in 2019, ahead of the US and of China, and tourism was a significant economic engine for the region, accounting 4% of GDP and employing 12 million people.

In this context, from 2017 onwards, the EU gave a new impetus to its integrated border management framework with the launch of several new major information systems, complementing the ones already existing. These new systems were designed to enhance security, while at the same time facilitating efficient border crossing. This new ‘smart border framework’, is the one we are currently developing. Importantly, in addition to developing new systems it builds upon gateways, known as the “interoperability components” that inter-connect the systems together significantly augmenting the efficiency of the framework towards seamless and safe travels and modern border management.

- **The first of these new systems, is the Entry/Exit System.** It will replace the manual checking and stamping of passports at the external borders of 29 European countries². EES will allow the electronic recording of the date, time and place of entry and exit of travellers from third countries. The EES will automatically compute the duration of authorised stay and send alerts when it expires. It will help expedite and reduce the time spent on border checks by travellers; it will also simplify and modernize business processes for border guards.
- **The European Travel Information and Authorisation System, ETIAS is another one of the major new system currently being developed.** Similar to the ESTA in the United States and the eTA in Canada and Australia, ETIAS was designed with the goal of travel facilitation, and it serves as an important component of the EU’s vision of seamless travel. ETIAS will be mandatory for about 1.4 billion people belonging to over 60 visa-exempt countries, who don’t need a visa to enter 30 European countries³. With its entry into operation, they will have to request a pre-authorisation to enter the Schengen area. The system will make it possible to check their eligibility through a dedicated online portal beforehand and reduce the risk of being denied entry once already arrived at the border crossing point.
- **The interoperability components will serve as gateway, that inter-connect the different EU smart border systems.** They enhance user-friendliness, seamless travel and security. Noticeably, the framework envisages a single European Search Portal that will facilitate querying the information from different systems and make it easier to retrieve necessary information. The IO components, also leverage advanced biometric technologies through different databases and search engines, to control for fraud and facilitate bona fide travels.
- Finally, with **the framework implements a “carrier interface” to support carriers.** The carrier interface **links the EU’s smart border system to carriers IT systems.** It will offer a single and user-friendly interface, that provides straightforward guidelines on to decisions to make regarding pre-border checks at gates and will also be accessible via web or a mobile app,

² 27 European countries which are part of the Schengen space + 2 non-Schengen European countries (Bulgaria and Romania)

³ 27 European countries which are part of the Schengen space + 3 non-Schengen European countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus)

So where are we today with the development of these new systems and the interoperability altogether?

When I joined the agency early this year, the development of this new smart border infrastructure was stalling, due to their complexity and challenges with our provider. This led to several delays in the provision and the entry into operations of these systems, that was initially planned for 2022.

Over the past months though, we have worked hard to develop a new approach to resolve the situation, based on three levers. A strategy that call the 3-Rs:

1. **Remobilize** our providers at all levels and commit them to the success the EU's priority with smart borders,
2. **Resolve pragmatically** the complexities of these systems and seek to deliver business value and new functionalities to our stakeholders as soon as possible,
3. **and Renew** our own working methods by applying industry best practice and agile methodologies.

I am glad to **share with you the good news that this strategy is already delivering strong results**. It has allowed us to relaunch the dynamics around the development of EU's interoperability framework and to confidently consider a new calendar for its implementation. This new calendar is now set to be endorsed during this Fall, by the relevant Governance bodies and political decision makers.

Now lets turn to the future of EU's border management systems. What does the future look like?

It is clear that the next developments envisaged by the EU are set to further enhance traveller mobility through technology and innovation. In particular, several high profile regulatory packages under discussion, clearly point to that direction:

- **With its eVISA regulation, the EU intends to fully digitalize the Schengen visa application process** in the coming years. It is foreseen that a dedicated online visa application platform will collect required information from applicants. This will significantly simplify a process that remains fairly manual and cumbersome today. The regulation also seeks to eliminate visa sticker and further streamline manual processes. Compared to today, the digitalization of the EU's visa process, will divide by 2 the cost o to the traveller of applying for visa.
- **We also see rising focus on digital identity – a pre-requisite for seamless travel**. To that extent, the European Digital Identity Framework was largely discussed during the recent Swedish presidency, with some positive advances made.
- **Digital travel credentials are also very much at the centre of attention**. The EU Commission is already working on the **digitisation of travel documents**. A proposal for a regulation should be presented by the end of the year, with the aim of becoming one of the first regions in the world to adopt the **Digital Travel Credential (DTC)** to facilitate international travel by further reducing border crossing times for passenger. The Commission's approach to digital travel credentials leverages ICAO's standards, in particular the Type 1 self-derived DTCs. 2 pilot projects are already underway:
 - On transatlantic flights⁴.
 - And on travels between Finland and the UK⁵

⁴ <https://www.idemia.com/press-release/idemia-selected-be-technology-provider-dutch-consortium-deploying-european-digital-travel-credential-pilot-between-canada-and-netherlands-2023-03-15>

⁵ <https://raja.fi/en/dtc#:~:text=The%20DTC%20pilot%20project%20will,and%2For%20arriving%20in%20Finland.>

- **I would also like to mention the upcoming API regulation**, which relates to the mandatory collection of Advance Passenger Information (API) and the rationalisation of data transmission from air carriers to the Member States, via a router, which should be developed and managed by eu-LISA.

It is clear that the EU border management systems seeks to facilitate and bring value at each of the important points in the traveller journey for all stakeholders. Let's consider some of the main benefits sought for the various stakeholders.

- **For travellers**, it seeks to simplify pre-travel authorisation acquisition; it aims to reduce visa application costs; to make border crossing faster and more convenient and overall, to foster a better traveller experience
- **For Carriers**, it provides direct access to information, through user-friendly digital tools, making business processes easier and more accurate to support pre-border checks
- **Finally, for Border guards and control authorities** it enhances security, improves traveller flows, streamlines manual processes and helps focus on most critical tasks and risk analysis.

To conclude, if I were to leave with just one take-home message, it is to underscore the pre-eminent goal of the EU's smart border management architecture to significantly **improve the experience for travellers to and from the Schengen area by leveraging new technologies and simplifying business processes for carriers and other border management professionals.**

Obviously at eu-LISA we are proud to serve this aspiration of making border crossings simpler and more secure, for passengers, for carriers and for border guards. And for those of you who'd like to reflect further on this topic, I invite you to review the Agency's recent report on seamless travel to the European Union, where you'll find much more on our topic today. You can access it by scanning the QR-code displayed on the screen.

Thank you for your attention.