

ALDE (Liberal group in the European Parliament

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US Congress rubber-stamps new law authorising spying on foreign nationals' calls and emails

Liberal Democrat MEPs, Sophie In't Veld and Graham Watson, have tabled today a written question to the European Commission and Council expressing serious concerns about the impact on data privacy for European citizens of a new US law proposed by the US Administration and approved by Congress at the end of last week.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act aims to intercept electronic communications of US and non-US citizens alike without requiring a special warrant and gives US authorities (National Intelligence Director and Attorney General) 'carte blanche' to determine the procedures for monitoring and assessing compliance.

The collection of foreign intelligence is deemed to be key in the fight against terrorism but is set so wide that it risks including vast amounts of innocent telecommunication traffic of business and private citizens using Blackberries, computers or other devices which use US based companies or service providers to relay messages and emails around the world.

Sophie In't Veld is particularly concerned about the extra territorial aspects of the new law which has been introduced unilaterally and without any consultation with European partners and will effectively allow US authorities to spy on EU citizens - even in their home countries if they are using US based technologies or service providers. In the aftermath of the SWIFT case on transfer of electronic payment data, European civil liberty campaigners are sounding alarm bells.

Ms. In't Veld wonders about the link with EU-US extradition agreements and whether information gained by such means can lead to automatic extradition without judicial oversight, what means exist to protect personal data and what means of redress are envisaged for EU citizens whose conversations are monitored.

A copy of the written question is attached.

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