



## MEPs question Commission over problems with biometric passports

The high number of falsified documents in Europe casts doubt on whether biometric passports, with personal data such as fingerprints, really do help to prevent fraud and tampering. After reported problems with biometric passports in France and the Netherlands, MEPs in Strasbourg are set on Thursday 19 April to question the Commission about the security of biometric passports and how to improve it.

### About biometric passports

The EU introduced biometric passports in 2004 to fight fraud. This means that travel documents issued by member states must include a storage medium with biometric data, such as fingerprints and a picture of the face.

### Risks identified by Parliament

The EP identified the following weak points during a revision of the biometric system in 2008:

- the reliability/usefulness of fingerprints taken from children and the elderly
- the level of confidence in the process of collecting biometric data
- shortcomings in identification systems and the error rates in member states
- lack of experience in the use of these new technologies
- the stages of the issuing procedure, such as presenting documents, collecting biometric data and checks at borders may hold the risk of fraud

The EP therefore suggested another three-year revision period in 2008 and asked the Commission to conduct studies in each of these areas. These studies are expected to be concluded this year.

### Problems encountered with biometric passports

In France 500,000 to 1 million of the 6.5 million biometric passports in circulation are estimated to be false, having been obtained on the basis of fraudulent documents.

In the Netherlands, an examination of 448 cases by local authorities in Roermond found that 21% of the fingerprints were non-verifiable and therefore useless.

### What the Commission will have to clarify

In the wake of the difficulties with biometric passports in France and the Netherlands, MEPs invited the Commission to the plenary session on 19 April 2012 to answer questions (see links on the right) about their efficiency. They will also ask if it will now consider re-evaluating the rules governing the issue of biometric passports in the EU.