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PRESS RELEASE

Fighting terrorism can never be an excuse to violate human rights, say MEPs

Governments and EU institutions have often responded to terrorist attacks by adopting laws that have not been sufficiently discussed and some times in violation of basic human rights such as right to privacy or to a fair trial, said the Civil Liberties Committee in a draft resolution which analyses EU counter-terrorism policy, to be voted in plenary next week. Members call for further scrutiny of intelligence operations and for more proportionate and evidence-based legislation in the future.

Analysing specific activities related to Europe's current counter-terrorism strategy - based on the goals of "prevention, protection, preparedness and response" - MEPs stressed the need for the Commission to carry out "an overall evaluation" on the effectiveness of legislation adopted, the degree of transposition by Member States, "and the positive and negative effects of these laws, both in terms of security and in terms of citizen's rights". Commissioner Frattini's recent proposals regarding the use of passenger name records (PNR) in Europe for law enforcement purposes and the directive on explosives will be assessed by Parliament "on an evidence based argumentation", say MEPs in the committee.

Avoid profiling

One of members' major concerns is the potential misuse by authorities of the personal information contained in numerous data bases - PNR, Eurodac, Schengen and Visa information systems - "to create profiles through data-mining techniques", which is not allowed at European level. MEPs in the committee said that profiling (the use of racial, ethnic or similar characteristics in determining whether a person is considered likely to commit a particular type of crime) should be avoided altogether and raised concerns in this regard on Mr Frattini's new proposal for an EU PNR system.

Democratic control of secret services

How can we avoid serious breaches of human rights in cases like the CIA illegal renditions in Europe? Although MEPs reiterate the importance of sharing intelligence information, both at EU level and among national secret services, further rules are needed to ensure the necessary democratic scrutiny and parliamentary control over their activities, the committee says.

Preventing radicalisation

The Committee believes that "cases such as the recent rejection of the US Supreme Court to deal with the Khalid Al-Masri complaint tend to reinforce the impression particularly by Muslim minorities in Europe that the anti-terror measures promulgate double standards". EU counter-terrorism policy should not only be based on police measures but should also support local actions aimed at "preventing violent radicalisation by fostering the integration of people through intercultural dialogue", says the committee. Measures are proposed to support democracy movements in Islamic countries, including the creation of more student exchanges and funding mass media stations which spread democratic ideas.

At the same time, staff involved in borders security and counter-terrorism activities should be trained about Islam, Muslim customs and Arabic languages, says the committee.

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