



# US Attorney General: "We all want to protect privacy, but in our own ways"

Committees: Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

**Both Europe and the USA want to protect their citizens' security and civil liberties, even though their legal systems differ greatly, US Attorney General Eric H. Holder told the Civil Liberties Committee on Tuesday. Replying to MEPs' remarks about the two sides' different ways of handling data protection, Mr Holder said "We must recognize that our systems protect civil liberties, including privacy, effectively, but in our own ways".**

"America's law enforcement relationship with the European Union and its Member States is one of my highest priorities", said Mr Holder, who heads the US Justice Department.

"Over the years, by working together (...) we have built a safer world", he said, adding "and as we've bolstered our crime-fighting efforts, we've also upheld civil liberties and the rule of law, and succeeded in protecting essential privacy rights".

Mr Holder cited organised crime, human trafficking, child pornography and cybercrime as areas in which EU-US co-operation has been successful.

## Data privacy partners

Several MEPs pointed to differences between the EU and the US in dealing with data protection. "We want legal certainty for our citizens travelling across the Atlantic", said Manfred Weber (EPP, DE). "My impression is that in the US privacy is a kind of conditional right", added Carmen Romero (S&D, ES).

Renate Weber (ALDE, RO), asked about legal guarantees and remedies to ensure that data protection rules are applied properly. "We are at an historic moment when we can build common standards, common rules", said Parliament's rapporteur on the EU-US data protection framework agreement, Jan Philipp Albrecht (Greens/EFA, DE).

The European Parliament's strong commitment to privacy was underlined by Civil Liberties Committee chairman Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D, ES).

"We value privacy a great deal in the US", replied Mr Holder, adding that "we cannot allow the differences to separate us from our common values. The US and the EU are much closer than some might have suggested".

Mr Holder also cited "substantial advances" made towards a new legal framework for the transfer of EU air passengers' data to the US authorities. "We don't view as the US having all the answers, but as working as partners. But sometimes we might have ideas that work better. Neither side will get all it wants, but in the end it is all about protecting our citizens", he said.

"It is impractical to suggest that we can impose the particularities of our respective legal systems on each other. Instead, we must mutually recognize that each of our systems protect civil liberties - including privacy - effectively, but in our own ways", he concluded, adding "Now we have a chance to consolidate those guarantees in an umbrella data protection and privacy agreement that will provide further assurances to our citizens".

# Press release

## Islamophobia and Guantanamo

Rui Tavares (Greens/EFA, PT), asked for Mr Holder's views on "islamophobia and extremely aggressive thinking towards the foreigner" in western societies. "Terrorism is not something connected to a particular religion", he replied, stressing the US authorities' efforts to make Muslim communities "feel part of our nation".

Mr Holder reaffirmed the Obama administration's commitment to close the Guantanamo detention facility, adding that "we have made a fundamental break to release some of the techniques used by the previous administration and declared that the US administration has made mistakes in the past".

"I am unaware of any suggestion that there ever has been a single data protection violation under the US-EU law enforcement agreements" (US-Europol Agreement, US-Eurojust Agreement and the EU-US Extradition and Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements), he added.

## Child pornography

Law enforcement officials and prosecutors from across Europe and the US had recently been able to shut down a major international ring of child pornographers and sexual predators, by putting the mutual legal assistance treaties to use and by working with Eurojust and Europol, noted Mr Holder.

"What might otherwise have been a single arrest quickly developed into a comprehensive investigation and prosecution of more than 20 defendants in five different countries. Together, we rescued more than 50 children, and put a stop to some of the most heinous crimes committed anywhere in the world", he concluded.

*In the chair: Juan Fernando LÓPEZ AGUILAR (S&D, ES)  
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