



SWIFT: European Parliament to vote on interim agreement at February session

The European Parliament will have the last word on the interim agreement on banking data transfers to the United States, signed on 30 November. Parliament will receive the text on Monday 25 January, and the Civil Liberties Committee will discuss it the next day. EP President Jerzy Buzek said on Thursday he would ask the Council to delay the agreement's entry into force from 1 February until after the EP has taken its plenary vote on it, at its February session.

On Wednesday, MEPs held a debate after the Council Presidency announced that the agreement would be sent to Parliament for its consent.

"This is now in your hands" said Spanish representative of the Council Presidency Diego López Garrido, after announcing that Parliament will receive, for its consent, the text of the provisional agreement, which was to take effect on 1 February for nine months. The Lisbon Treaty will also allow for "full participation of the European Parliament" in the drafting of the long term agreement that should follow, he added.

Mr López Garrido explained that the delay in sending the agreement to Parliament was due to the need to translate documents into all EU languages.

"Apply EU standards to EU data"

"The whole debate has been marked by frustration and irritation of Members because we had the feeling that Council created facts on the ground before involving us", said Manfred Weber (EPP, DE), after welcoming the Council statement.

Mr Weber said that the agreement would have to meet several criteria in order to win his group's support. "We need to apply EU standards to EU data", "to give people a right of redress" in the event of misuse of personal data, and to allow access to data "on a case by case basis", he explained. "We have an open mind. It's up to the Council of Ministers to persuade us that this agreement is useful in order to fight terrorism", he added.

"We have not been involved - this is unacceptable"

"It's an extremely serious procedure" said Martin Schulz (S&D, DE). "When you tell us that the translations led to this delay, with all due respect, you're trying to protect yourself", he told the Council representative. "I think it is far more serious, we have not been involved and this is unacceptable", he continued, adding that "the SWIFT agreement provides for quite serious infringements of private rights".

Now "we have to ensure that data protection is guaranteed, that the necessary deadlines are met", as well as the right to redress and the possibility to go to court, he said, stressing that "citizens must be protected from the arbitrary nature of state intervention".

EP vote before 1 February?

Press release

The Council statements were "good news" said Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, BE), adding that he would propose that the EP Conference of Presidents schedule a plenary vote before the agreement's entry into force, scheduled for 1 February. "A yes depends on certain conditions. Parliament should receive all the necessary information and should be fully involved in the negotiation of the definitive agreement", he said, adding that the provisional text would also have to fulfil the specific conditions laid down in the resolution voted by the European Parliament last year.

"EU citizens want parliamentary control"

"We've heard that the EP is a little annoyed and this is a justified annoyance", said Rebecca Harms (Greens/EFA, DE). "It's extremely dangerous if Council decides to allow this interim agreement to come into force without having put it to Parliament for a vote. If you try to push it through as fast as possible, it would be an infringement of the treaty", she told the Council representative. She said that EU citizens want parliamentary control of the issue and that "they will not accept a violation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights", which would be "a kamikaze action" by the Council.

"Consent must not be a retrospective tool"

"Recent events remind us how important it is to share information in order to ensure the security of EU citizens. And SWIFT is a valuable tool for this", said Timothy Kirkhope (ECR, UK). He explained that US government officials had reassured him, about the "multi-layer control system and safeguards and independent oversight, which I hope will lead to the implementation of the agreement being beyond reproach". However, he too was concerned about the delay in consulting Parliament, and said that consent "must not be a retrospective tool".

"This house has been treated a humiliating way. Saying that we had to wait for linguistic versions is unacceptable", said Rui Tavares (GUE/NGL, PT). He added that the data retention period laid down in the agreement (five years) would lead "data collected under the Obama presidency to be kept under the Sarah Palin presidency".

Martin Ehrenhauser (NI, AT) said that "a lot of measures have already been adopted" in order to fight terrorism and that "the SWIFT agreement seems to lead to unacceptable restrictions on civil rights". "We would have to think very carefully before adopting the interim agreement and ask Council to respect some undertakings" he added.

Contact :

Baptiste CHATAIN

LIBE

Press Service - Press Officer

BXL: (+32) 2 28 40992

STR: (+33) 3 881 74005

PORT: (+32) 498 98 35 90

EMAIL: libe-press@europarl.europa.eu

Simon DUFFIN

London

Press Officer (London)

STR: (+33) 3 881 74256

PORT: (+44) 7 786 060 531

EMAIL: Press-en@europarl.europa.eu

EMAIL: simon.duffin@europarl.europa.eu

ADDINFO: (+44) 207 227 43 35

Eimear NÍ BHROIN

Dublin

Press Officer (Dublin)

STR: (+33) 3 881 64122

PORT: (+353) 868 559 423

EMAIL: Press-en@europarl.europa.eu

Press release

EMAIL: eimear.nibhroin@europarl.europa.eu
ADDINFO: (+353) 1 605 79 32