



Prism: MEPs hit out at US surveillance of people's personal data

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MEPs criticised a secret American programme to gather user data and questioned the implications for privacy, data protection and EU-US security collaboration. Parliament held a debate on the Prism programme on Tuesday morning after the Guardian and the Washington Post revealed its existence over the weekend. Most speakers roundly condemned the programme and the US's assurances that only non-Americans were targeted, but insisted on the value for Europe of security cooperation with the US.

The Commission

Speaking on behalf of the Commission, Tonio Borg, the commissioner for health and consumer policy, said: "Programmes such as the so-called Prism and the laws on the basis of which such programmes are authorised potentially endanger the fundamental right to privacy and to data protection of EU citizens."

The Commission will raise the issue at the EU-US ministerial in Dublin on Friday, Mr Borg added, pointing out that in a democracy, law enforcement bodies should follow the rules.

The political groups

"My data belongs to me, that is the cornerstone of European thinking on data protection," said **Manfred Weber**, the German vice-chair of the EPP group. "It is completely unacceptable that the US have different rules for] US citizens and citizens of other countries." He added: "The US approach is not our approach but we work together as partners".

On behalf of S&D, **Claude Moraes**, spoke of "a major breach of trust, non compliant with EU data protection legislation", yet cautioned that the "vital balance between security and the need to protect data, must be safeguarded". The British MEP added: "Trust has clearly been breached. We must ensure US public authorities processing EU citizens data, do so within our standards."

"We are failing the EU citizens and we should be ashamed of ourselves," **Sophie In 't Veld**, a Dutch member of the ALDE group. She criticised the Commission and the "doublespeak" of member states. "Obama said to his citizens: 'Don't worry, we are not spying on you as citizens, we are only spying on foreigners.' But this is us." She added: "What kind of special relationship is that?"

"This not only about data protection, this is about democracy and the rule of law, which cannot be in line with mass surveillance of citizens around the world," said **Jan Philipp Albrecht**. The German member of the Green group, who is responsible for steering new legislation on data protection through Parliament, said: "I would like to agree on standards with the US but we need legislative changes on the other side of the Atlantic too."

However, **Timothy Kirkhope**, a British member of the ECR group, commented: "Those companies already named and shamed have so far denied acting outside the law... yet

here we are already pointing the finger, some of you already expressing anti American or anti commission rhetoric."

Jaroslav Paška, a Slovakian member of the EFD group, said: "We have to adopt the same sanctions against these companies which we apply to others who violate our laws. The paranoid behaviour of our American partners is regrettable."

Marie-Christine Vergiat, a French member of the GUE/NGL group, said the main concern is "that EU citizens do not enjoy the same rights as US citizens" and called for EU negotiators with the US to make sure the US authorities respect the privacy rights of Europeans.

Martin Ehrenhauser, an unattached member from Austria, said: "We should start an inquiry to see what legal implications this programme has and to see which European secret services profit from the data gathered. Does Europol profit? And we should finally invite American representatives into this House so they can testify on this. The path we are currently following leads straight away from democracy."