



Citizens' rights: MEPs shape the Stockholm programme

A five-year blueprint for laws to consolidate EU citizens' rights and improve their access to justice, protection and solidarity was debated by MEPs and their national counterparts on Thursday.

A draft resolution, which should serve as a blueprint for freedom, security and justice legislation over the next five years, sets out priorities for work on EU citizenship, including measures for the protection of citizens, solidarity, access to justice and reaping the full benefits of the single market through European contract law.

"We need to earn respect"

As the European Parliament will become a co-deciding body if the Lisbon Treaty is ratified, "we need to earn respect", notably by "strengthening our capacity to work with national parliaments", said Civil Liberties Committee chair Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S-D, ES). The role of MPs "should not be seen as replacing ours, but instead to involve the people of Europe more directly (...) this is important when implementing the principle of subsidiarity" added Constitutional Affairs Committee chair Carlo Casini (EPP, IT).

The aim of the Stockholm programme is to "strike a balance between the need for security and avoiding the risk of going too far and undermining the rights we have built in so many years", explained Legal Affairs Committee chair Luigi Berlinguer (S-D, IT).

"Security seems to have been watered down"

Simon Busuttil (EPP, MT) explained that his group "wants a citizen's Europe and a safer Europe, with the emphasis on the second element". He regretted that in the draft resolution, "the axis on security seems to have been watered down". He also advocated "a strong solidarity, solidarity of action, not of words". This was echoed by Claude Moraes (S-D, UK), for whom "the key points on solidarity in this resolution need amendments" to strengthen them. "This is a balanced text", he added but "We will need new instruments on asylum".

Andrew Duff (ALDE, UK) proposed that the text should address the complexities of the "core group process" (allowing qualified majority voting in the Council), in which "a core group of Member States is propelled forward", he said, adding that it also "would be helpful to spell out explicitly the competences of national Parliaments".

"There are fundamental rights that are absolute. There is no balance in this text. We see more and more preventive measures" said Jan Philipp Albrecht (Greens/EFA, DE), adding that "I don't think proportionality is guaranteed". Mario Borghezio (EFD, IT) regretted that "the document doesn't contain what it should", and notably "a judicial response" to "terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism" He also urged legislators to "look closely" at possible links between terrorist organisations and human trafficking networks.

"The future will be more democratic"

Press release

“By necessity and by conviction we will put the emphasis on fundamental rights”, as the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), improves transparency and openness, both in law-making and in other processes, said the Swedish Presidency representative. The Council will look more closely into security and justice issues, "having in mind that we still have a security threat in Europe", he concluded.

“The future will be more democratic” in the area of freedom, security and justice, said the Commission representative, since there will be more scrutiny by the European Parliament and judicial review by the European Court of Justice when the Lisbon Treaty comes into force.

N.B. :

The resolution will be put to the vote on 12 November in a joint committee meeting in Brussels.

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