



MEPs and national MPs debate Stockholm programme

More cooperation is needed on judicial affairs but without compromising national traditions and fundamental rights, concluded national and European MPs, who are both set to see their responsibilities increased in this area by the Lisbon Treaty. The parliamentarians debated the five-year priorities for justice, freedom and security at a meeting at the EP on Tuesday.

According to EP President Jerzy Buzek, "the Lisbon Treaty, which for the first time confers an active role on national parliaments at EU level, will enter into force in about two weeks' time. It should focus on addressing the problems of migration on the basis of solidarity; strike a better balance between the security of citizens (e.g. protection of external borders, prosecution of trans-border crime) and the protection of their individual rights; provide citizens with fair access to justice; and settle the practical problems which citizens face in the European Union in matters subject to different legal orders".

Rights: the next generation

Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar (S&D, ES), chair of the Civil Liberties Committee and rapporteur for the working party on citizens' rights, argued that "national rights are not dissolved in the Union" but that the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights will "improve and enrich them". It is important to guarantee "rights of the next generation", notably in the areas of bioethics and new technologies.

Abolishing the exequatur procedure

Anti Avsan of the Swedish Riksdag, who is rapporteur of the working party on a Europe of Justice, believed it was "positive to move towards a common area of justice but we must respect certain specificities". However, "there is a certain consensus in favour of abolishing the exequatur procedure", he said, and in favour of mutual recognition of court rulings. This view was endorsed by Justice Commissioner Jacques Barrot, who called for a number of obstacles to be removed.

Freedom and security: a tricky balance

Carmen Hermosin Bono, rapporteur of the working party on the protection of citizens, identified "two lines of thought": those who "believe we must develop the European area on the basis of security issues" and those who think that security needs must not weaken individual rights.

The Swedish justice minister and president-in-office of the Council, Beatrice Ask, thought it was necessary to move "towards normalisation of data exchange for police purposes and common rules on data protection and privacy".

Simon Busuttill (EPP, MT) criticised the condemnation of Italy by the European Court of Human Rights for its law requiring crucifixes to be hung in schools, and urged respect for national traditions. Regarding future legislation, he thought that while "finding the balance between freedom and security will not be easy", the most important thing was the quality of transposition of European legislation by the Member States.

"Security aspects of the programme are worrying"

Press release

Annie David of the French Senate believed "the security aspects of the programme are worrying" and give the impression of a "fortress Europe". Alberto Maritati of the Italian Senate believed "the burning issue is migration". We must stop giving priority to trying to stamp it out. "We cannot allow Europe to flex its muscles and bare its teeth to people who fleeing wars", she said.

"Discussion costs nothing but we need to face the reality", argued Andrew Brons (NA, UK), who believed that "in many situations, freedom of expression is in danger".

17 November 2009

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

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