



Stockholm programme: balancing liberty and security

The EU has to strike the right balance between security and fundamental rights, MEPs and MPs said at a joint meeting to discuss the EU's new 5-year "Stockholm" programme to promote citizens' rights, democratic accountability and security in Europe. The European Parliament will discuss the Stockholm priorities during its plenary session next week in Strasbourg.

The "Building a Citizen's Europe" meeting concluded that EU countries must increase cooperation in judicial matters, without compromising national traditions and fundamental rights.

A question of trust

Cooperation is hampered by the different legal traditions in EU countries and a lack of mutual trust and confidence in decisions by other member state authorities. "The quality of administrative decisions can vary and it's important to underscore legal certainty and its guarantees," said Anti Avsan from the Swedish Riksdag. Justice Commissioner Jacques Barrot said, "mutual recognition will remain the cornerstone," while Swedish Justice Minister Beatrice Ask said EU countries "will have to rely on each other".

Balancing liberty and security



Participants stressed the importance of striking the right balance between enhancing security and safeguarding fundamental rights: data exchange to fight cross-border crime and terrorism is necessary but in parallel it's important to protect privacy, personal data and fundamental freedoms. As Maltese Christian Democrat MEP Simon Busuttill said, "for some of us the fight against terrorism is a priority, but for others it's the protection of fundamental rights."

No to a "fortress Europe"

Some speakers raised concerns about a "fortress Europe", where people are locked out by strong immigration policies. Greek MP Dimitrios Papadimoulis said, "immigration is also a question of human rights. Often rights are blown away with security issues."

Polish MP Zbigniew Cichon noted that Europe was divided just 20 years ago, "therefore, I would be cautious not to build another wall in Europe. Often expulsion brings tragic consequences not only for the person but also for the family."

Lisbon: a catalogue of rights for Europeans

The meeting comes just before the Lisbon Treaty comes into force on 1 December. That will mean increased responsibility for the EP and better protection for EU citizens through the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Civil Liberties Committee Chair Juan Fernando López said the Charter will "multiply and enrich" the rights of European citizens under member states' constitutions, stressing that "national rights are not dissolved in the Union". He also said it is important to ensure rights in the areas of bioethics and new technologies.

Stockholm programme

- Framework for police, justice and customs cooperation, asylum, migration, visa policy for 2010–2014
- Aims: promoting citizens' rights, security, building a Europe of solidarity
- Europe's current 5-year "Hague" programme will expire in 2009