**Věra Jourová,** *Member of the Commission***.** – Mr President, our right as European citizens to move freely within the Union is one of the most important achievements of European integration. It requires that the documents we use when exercising this right are secure and reliable. A number of Member States still issue ID cards that do not meet international standards. Some even issue paper ID cards and many such ID cards remain in circulation. Weak ID cards represent a serious security gap. They can easily be falsified and could be used by terrorists and other criminals to enter the EU. That is why the Commission proposed a regulation to strengthen security features for ID and residence documents in April 2018 as part of a wider package of security measures.

I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Gérard Deprez, for his excellent cooperation on this initiative. His efforts to find acceptable and workable solutions were tireless and, in the end, successful. Let me also thank all the shadow rapporteurs for their hard work and commitment. Last but not least, let me thank the Romanian and Austrian presidencies for their efforts.

I would like to stress that the regulation does not oblige Member States to introduce ID cards if they do not already issue such cards, nor does it make ID cards mandatory in those cases where they are optional. In these situations citizens will continue to use a passport instead. Also, the new rules on ID cards cannot serve as a legal basis to introduce national databases containing citizens’ biometric data.

Regarding biometrics, I know there have been intensive discussions on whether ID cards should contain a chip with the fingerprints of the holder and whether this should be compulsory for all Member States that issue ID cards. We have consistently argued that fingerprints are a necessary security feature. The inclusion of biometric identifiers, and particularly the inclusion of fingerprints, renders documents more reliable and secure, and having secure and reliable ID cards is in the interest of citizens.

Fingerprints on ID cards is also consistent with the approach for passports. Many Member States already include fingerprints in their ID cards or may be planning to do so, but only an obligation at EU level can make sure there is no weak link in our area of free movement without internal border controls.

At the same time, we agree with Parliament that robust data protection and fundamental rights safeguards are essential. Thanks to Parliament’s efforts, the text makes clear that Member States are fully responsible for the safe handling of citizens’ data. Changes introduced by Parliament will also make sure that the keys necessary to verify biometric data stored on the chip are exchanged between the Member States.

To summarise, the new common minimum standards will make sure that EU citizens can rely on secure and reliable documents. We fully support the compromise found by Parliament and the Council and look forward to tomorrow’s vote.