

Parliament discussions begin on new Border Package

Written by George Koukoulakis on 11 March 2016 in News
News

MEPs take first look at Commission proposals for improving the management of Europe's external borders.



The civil liberties, justice and home affairs (LIBE) committee had their first exchange of views with DG Home Director General Matthias Ruete on the Commission's Border Package proposals and how Europe manages its external borders.

MEPs discussed proposals for establishing a European border and coast guard agency to replace Frontex. Ruete urged deputies to deal with these files promptly, so as to make the measures operational as soon as possible and allow for a rapid response to the current migratory and security pressures.

Latvian EPP deputy Artis Pabriks, rapporteur for the dossier, said that the Commission proposal met demands for open borders for refugees; "In order to have open borders, we first need them to be controlled." S&D Hungarian deputy Péter Niedermüller agreed, while arguing that the measures had to take a long-term approach.

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However, there were some disagreements over priorities. Belgian ECR representative Helga Stevens wanted to see a focus on making asylum and return procedures more effective, while German deputy Ska Keller, shadow rapporteur for the Greens/EFA group, sought to place priority on the new agency's search and rescue function. Meanwhile, ENF group MEP Vicky Maeijer believed that the main focus of the agency must be stopping illegal migrants from arriving in Europe.

Inevitably, discussion also touched on Schengen borders. Monica Macovei, rapporteur on the Schengen borders code, stressed the importance of the file in "improving citizens' feeling of security and fighting xenophobia." She also argued that the new measures should encompass the protection of all EU citizens, including non-Schengen members.

However, ALDE, Greens/EFA and GUE members voiced concerns over the need for large-scale checks and the risks they posed to citizens' fundamental freedoms. Targeted checks, they argued, were preferable, and they criticised the Commission for not undertaking an impact assessment. However, they were ready to accept the new measures, if that was the price of saving Schengen.

MEPs also discussed a third file of the Border Package, namely the European travel document for returning of illegal third-country nationals. The majority of readmission agreements with third countries, in order to improve the return process, were the most important.

Parliament's report on the new border and coast guard agency is expected to be finalised by LIBE and be adopted by the Parliament by June this year. Meanwhile, the Netherlands EU Council presidency is also committed to adopt its position within its mandate.

About the author

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